

AN INTERSECTIONAL ECOFEMINIST LAND LABOR ETHIC

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **AN INTERSECTIONAL ECOFEMINIST LAND LABOR ETHIC**

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Farmworkers are one of the most exploited populations in the United States. They face challenges involving social ostracization, wage exploitation, racial, class, and gender discrimination, as well as health problems related to the environment, for example pesticide exposure. These challenges are linked to the problems ecofeminism identifies, and as such, ecofeminism is a good resource for understanding and achieving farmworker justice. Liberation theology provides the guideline for people of faith to address injustices in the world through its understanding of theology as a three-step process: praxis, reflection, and renewed praxis.

The central concerns of ecofeminism parallel those of farmworkers. These four concerns are mirror the four concerns of farmworkers above: 1) hierarchal and dualistic value systems which radically distance the Other, 2) patriarchal power systems based on oppression and exploitation, 3) systemic racism that disenfranchises Black, Indigenous Peoples, and people of color, and 4) neglect of the earth which has repercussions on all humans, particularly vulnerable populations. People of faith look to religion as a resource to solve these issues but first must acknowledge religion's role in contributing to these problems.

Two faith-based initiatives have attempted to rectify the situation of farmworker exploitation: the fair trade movement and United Farm Workers. These two initiatives are evaluated from an intersectional ecofeminist perspective, concluding that both initiatives failed because they reinforced to some extent one or all of ecofeminism's concerns: fair trade

especially reinforces hierarchal dualisms and the idea white people are superior to Black, Indigenous and people of color, while the UFW struggles with internal patriarchal power dynamics and falls short of creating sustained change.

Based on this evaluation, an intersectional ecofeminist framework is proposed for a more effective way to achieve justice for farmworkers and other land laborers. The four principles of this framework are 1) diversity in response to hierarchy, 2) radical approaches in response to patriarchy: they must address foundational problems as opposed to symptoms, 3) solidarity which requires sacrifice, in response to racism, 4) enriching practices that enrich the earth, relationships, and our bodies in response to the neglect of the earth. These four principles correspond to the above four critiques of ecofeminism, and also represent liberation theology's 'renewed praxis.'

Despite religion's role in contributing to the problems it does offer assets for people of faith who implementing the framework: it provides an ideal form to which we should aspire, and guidance for the sometimes self-sacrificing work of putting the framework into practice.

This paper concludes that the best way for people of faith to work for farmworker justice is to do the work they are called to: for white people in affluent western nations this means to start with the part of the problem they and their religion have caused through self-examination of one's complicity.

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## CHAPTER 1:

### Introduction

*Farm workers are involved in the planting and the cultivation and the harvesting of the greatest abundance of food known in this society. They bring in so much food to feed you and me and the whole country and enough food to export to other places. The ironic thing, and the tragic thing is that after they make this tremendous contribution, they don't have any money, or any food left for themselves.... When the man who feeds the world by toiling in the fields is himself deprived of the basic rights of feeding, sheltering, and caring for his own family, the whole community of man is sick.<sup>1</sup>*

-César Chávez

*I don't think I could base my will to struggle on cold economics or some political doctrine. For me, the base must be faith.<sup>2</sup>*

-César Chávez

### **1.1 Defining and Contextualizing the Problem**

The sun was barely up, and it was already over 80 degrees. As I inched up the freeway overpass I could see the dark green rows of strawberries stretched out underneath, punctuated by bundles of white, red, and navy—workers bowed to the ground, hastily picking the dark red fruit. My home, Orange County, is known for its strawberries. In spring, at strawberry festivals and ‘you-pick’ farm tours across the region, parents jump at the opportunity to photograph their

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<sup>1</sup> Sustainable Food Center, “The Hands that Feed Us: Farmworkers, Food Security, and a Fair Wage,” (September, 2015), <https://sustainablefoodcenter.org/latest/farms-markets/the-hands-that-feed-us-farmworkers-food-security-and-a-fair-wage> (accessed June 29, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Mario T. García, *The Gospel of César Chávez: My Faith in Action* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 3.

children between the rows with a basket full of warm berries, juice dripping down their chins. A tractor ride around the farm ends with a few minutes of picking time, and families head home with a basket full of fresh berries, contributing to the more than 1.8 billion pounds of strawberries picked each year on the California coast. California produces 88% of the nation's strawberries, a product that must be meticulously picked by hand at the peak of their ripeness.<sup>3</sup>

As summer begins and temperatures climb, the strawberry harvest season comes to an end in southern California and the harvest, followed by the farmworkers, moves north to cooler counties. This year though, summer was exceptionally hot and arrived early. The farmworkers below the overpass usually work on chilly mornings, with clouds of vaporized breath rising from the fields. For workers who are accustomed to working throughout the colder season, longer hotter summers introduce the risks of heat exhaustion, dehydration, and chronic kidney failure. Workers following the strawberry harvest north will get relief from the rising temperatures, but not those who are going to the Temecula Valley in southern California for the grape harvest starting in late summer where temperatures reach into the 100s daily.

Extreme temperatures are just one of the rough conditions farmworkers encounter. The challenges farmworkers face can be classified into four categories: pay, conditions, employer accountability, and access. In terms of pay, farmworkers receive some of the lowest wages in the United States. Over 60% of farmworkers family incomes fall below the poverty line.<sup>4</sup> In

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<sup>3</sup> California Strawberry Commission, "California Strawberry Farming," (January 2018), <http://www.calstrawberry.com/Portals/2/Reports/Industry%20Reports/Industry%20Fact%20Sheets/California%20Strawberry%20Farming%20Fact%20Sheet%202018.pdf?ver=2018-03-08-115600-790> (accessed August 18, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> National Center for Farmworker Health, "Agricultural Worker Demographics," National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc., 2018, [https://web.archive.org/web/20190101190239/http://www.ncfh.org/uploads/3/8/6/8/38685499/fs\\_demographics\\_2018.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20190101190239/http://www.ncfh.org/uploads/3/8/6/8/38685499/fs_demographics_2018.pdf) (accessed August 28, 2018).

California, the average yearly salary of a farmworker is estimated to be \$17,500.<sup>5</sup> For farmworkers picking strawberries in Orange County, that is well below the county's poverty level of \$23,000, and less than a third of the county's median income of \$61,250 for a one-person household.<sup>6</sup> In fact, it's well below the poverty line in most California counties.

Farmworker wages are low for a number of reasons. First, many farmworkers work for "piece rate" rather than hourly wages, meaning they are paid by the quantity of produce they pick. Second, small farms are not subject to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), meaning that they, or farms with less than 500 'man days' work a calendar quarter, do not have to adhere to the Fair Labor Standards Act which includes laws pertaining to minimum wage and overtime. Third, growers can circumvent the laws that do exist by hiring their labor force through farm labor contractors (FLCs). Finally, wage violations and wage theft are common in the agricultural sector, particularly among workers employed by FLCs.<sup>7</sup> These issues are exasperated by the fact that many, if not most farmworkers are undocumented, and face retaliation or deportation if they complain. Calculating farmworkers' wages is a complicated task and will be discussed in more detail below.

Farmworkers are also exploited in terms of the conditions they are expected to endure. Extreme temperatures are an ever-present hazard. Cold temperatures bring the risk of frostbite, hypothermia, and lung complications. Hot temperatures, on the other hand, bring the dangers of

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<sup>5</sup> Philip Martin and Daniel Costa, "Farmworker wages in California: Large gap between full-time equivalent and actual earnings," Economic Policy Institute, entry posted March 21, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190101190943/https://www.epi.org/blog/farmworker-wages-in-california-large-gap-between-full-time-equivalent-and-actual-earnings/> (accessed August 30, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> State of California Department of Housing and Community Development, memorandum by Zachary Olmstead, *State Income Limits for 2018: California Code of Regulations, Title 25, Section 6932*, April 26, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190101192916/http://www.hcd.ca.gov/grants-funding/income-limits/state-and-federal-income-limits/docs/inc2k18.pdf> (accessed September 6, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Sustainable Food Center, "The Hands that Feed Us."

dehydration, kidney failure, heat stroke, and death. These extreme temperatures make farmworkers four times more likely than non-agricultural workers to suffer from heat related illnesses.<sup>8</sup> As climate change continues, extreme heat is becoming much more common, putting outdoor workers at increased risk. Farmworkers paid by piece rate are particularly vulnerable because of the financial disincentive to take breaks for rest, water, and shade, even if these provisions are supplied by the employer. It is important to consider that most states do not have laws requiring the provision of shade and water, but even in California, the only state that requires water and shade, it was not until 2015 that the code was amended to ensure that the shade “does not deter use” through the presence of hazards, or that water be fit to drink, meaning “fresh, pure, suitably cool, and provided to employees free of charge,” as well as being close to the work area.<sup>9</sup>

Pesticide exposure is another environmental danger facing farmworkers. Farmworkers can come in contact with these toxic substances through direct exposure, for example, getting sprayed while picking crops or reentering fields prematurely after pesticide application; they can also encounter them indirectly, for example, from handling pesticide containers or not following guidelines for use because the warning labels are not in Spanish, or when an employer fails to provide water to wash hands and clothes, or from breathing pesticide drift. Pesticide exposure is linked to cancer, autism, memory loss, decreased fertility, and women are especially vulnerable due to its impact on reproductive problems and developmental abnormalities.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Rachel Cartier, “California Farm Owner Liability for Heat-Related Injuries to their Independent Farm Labor Contractor’s Farm Worker Employees,” *San Joaquin Agricultural Law Review* 19, no. 1 (2009-2010): 96.

<sup>9</sup> State of California Department of Industrial Relations, *Heat Illness Prevention Regulation Amendments*, California Code of Regulations, Title 8, Section 3395 (May 14, 2015), 2-3, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190101194742/https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/documents/Heat-Illness-Prevention-Regulation-Amendments.pdf> (accessed August 21, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> National Farm Worker Ministry, “Farm Worker Issues: Health and Safety,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20190101210726/http://nfwm.org/resources/health-safety/> (accessed August 28, 2018).

Employer accountability is another challenge for farmworkers, particularly women who face sexual harassment and assault with little to no ability to protest. Farmworker employees have few avenues in place to confront employers who do not adhere to laws and regulations, or who turn a blind eye to sexual violence in the fields. Laws protecting farmworkers are minimal, but even when laws are in place, they are often not enforced. California has the most progressive regulations protecting farmworkers, however, the State of California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) agency reported that compliance with the Heat Illness Prevention standard was at only 70% in 2013.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, when violation fines are issued, they are often not paid. Rachel Cartier notes that in 2008, “inspectors from Cal/OSHA issued more than \$3.9 million dollars in heat-safety violation fines.” The year prior, only \$593,00 of the of heat-safety violation fines were actually paid.<sup>12</sup>

Even more concerning, employers whose licenses have been revoked due to serious violations have had their licenses reinstated shortly thereafter. For example, Merced Farm Labor was charged with involuntary manslaughter after the death of Maria Isabel Vasquez Jimenez, a 17-year-old worker who died of heat stroke while pruning grapes near Lodi, CA. However, two years prior in 2006, the owner was “fined \$2,250 and had her license revoked; yet, she never paid any fines or appealed, and her contractor’s license was later renewed.”<sup>13</sup> Even though the FLC owner and safety coordinator were eventually convicted of manslaughter in the case, they received only community service, and their license was temporarily reinstated one month later.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Mauricio Peña, “Death in the Fields,” *The Desert Sun*, Nov 19, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190101204208/https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/2015/11/19/death-fields/74058984/> (accessed September 13, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Cartier, “California Farm Owner Liability for Heat-Related Injuries,” 98.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>14</sup> United Farm Workers, “Chronology on heat death of Maria Isabel Vasquez Jimenez,” March 7, 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190101204726/https://ufw.org/Chronology-on-heat-death-of-Maria-Isabel-Vasquez-Jimenez/> (accessed September 14, 2018).

Employers are often not held accountable and are also unaware of sexual harassment and assault occurring among their employees. A study by Jeanne Murphy et. al., revealed that there is a lack of workplace protections against sexual harassment, specifically a lack of education and procedures to report offenders, and in some cases, a refusal by foremen and bosses to do anything about reports. Women in the study reported that they or other women engage in tactics including “ignoring or even pretending to consent to harassment, worried that reporting the behavior would lead to losing their jobs.”<sup>15</sup>

*“[The foreman] does not treat us all the same; he notices a few younger women and sometimes may force them or grab them. As I said, it hasn’t happened to me but I’ve seen it happening. Those who give into it get an easier job, and I get a harder one because I don’t give into it.”*

-Group 2006-05, Mixteco<sup>16</sup>

Indigenous Mexican farmworker women who do not speak Spanish are particularly vulnerable because of language, as are single women with children because of a need to work and to stay in the same place. The study also found that many women do not report behavior because they had no idea how to deal with sexual harassment at work and because they did not think they would be believed. This study was published in 2015 and is the first study of indigenous Mexican farmworkers’ experiences of workplace sexual harassment and sexual assault.<sup>17</sup>

This low level of enforcement leads to lack of accountability to the workers and to the government. Workers lack the platform and confidence to demand their employers abide by the

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<sup>15</sup> Jeanne Murphy, et.al., “‘They Talk Like That, But We Keep Working:’ Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Experiences Among Mexican Indigenous Farmworker Women in Oregon,” *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 17, no. 6 (December 2015), 1834.

<sup>16</sup> Murphy, et. al., “They Talk Like That, But We Keep Working,” 1837.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 1839.

law, fearing retaliation, job loss, or deportation. The government has little incentive to enforce the law and does not have adequate resources to enforce its standards.

Finally, access is a major challenge for farmworkers: that is, the ability for farmworkers and their families to access healthcare, safe and affordable housing, and healthy food. Due to the high risk of work related injury and sickness of agricultural workers, access to health care is vital for farmworkers. The primary hurdles they face take the form of transportation as well lack of awareness of available services.<sup>18</sup> Most farmworkers live in rural areas, do not have a car, and there is no public transportation available. Furthermore, lack of information, fear, and discrimination often prevent people from seeking medical attention when it is needed, let alone seeking preventative care. In terms of housing, many farmworkers struggle to find affordable housing, especially those who are only in a location temporarily. Some employers provide housing in the form of a renovated hotel, low income housing, or labor camps located on the property.

Many rural farming areas in the United States are food deserts. Especially for workers living on the grower's property without transportation, accessing grocery stores with healthy food choices, and being able to afford that food is not realistic. For this reason, farmworkers report disproportionately high rates of food insecurity—up to 82% in some areas.<sup>19</sup> Enabling access to basic necessities such as food and healthcare is a preliminary step in creating a healthy, fairly treated workforce.

The challenges farmworkers face are amplified because they are an invisible population. They are literally omitted from laws, do not have citizenship and so are unacknowledged or worse—they are ghosts in their home yet they contribute to the United States in the form of an

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<sup>18</sup> National Farm Worker Ministry, “Farm Worker Issues: Health and Safety.”

<sup>19</sup> Sustainable Food Center, “The Hands that Feed Us.”

estimated 3% of the nation's GDP.<sup>20</sup> Because of this I will dedicate space throughout this paper to sharing their experiences in their own words, signified by blocking and italics:

*“From when you arrive in Calexico at two am to when you return from work is anywhere from eleven to fifteen hours, depending how far away the fields are. Still, they only pay you for the eight hours you work in the fields. If you work eight hours at four fifty an hour, that’s thirty-six dollars. After taxes, the government leaves you with about thirty-two dollars. Very few companies have their own buses. So to get to work you often have to pay a ritero three dollars to and from work. If I work in San Clemente, I leave my house at one in the morning and don’t make it back to home until nine at night. Then it’s twenty hours for the same twenty-eight dollars...Sometimes the mayordomos make you buy soda or food from them. If you don’t buy anything, the next day when you come looking for work, they’ll say, ‘Sorry, I’ve got a full crew.’...After work, you come back tired and a friend might say, “Hey, Gilberto, let’s go drink a beer.” A beer costs another dollar fifty. So, you have to tell your friend that you’ll drink a beer with him another day...”<sup>21</sup>*

-Gilberto Perez commutes from Calexico, CA to work on farms throughout southern California.

*“When she fell, she looked bad. She didn’t regain consciousness. She just fell down and didn’t react. I told her to be strong, so we could see each other again.”<sup>22</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> Ryan Edwards and Francesc Ortega, “The Economic Contribution of Unauthorized Workers: An Industry Analysis,” *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, National Bureau of Economic Research: Working Paper 22834 (November 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Rothenberg, *With These Hands: The Hidden World of Migrant Farmworkers Today* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 19.

<sup>22</sup> Sasha Khokha, “Teem Farmworker’s Heat Death Sparks Outcry,” *All Things Considered*, NPR, originally broadcast June 6, 2008.



*“The contractors said, ‘Don’t say she was working [for the contractor]. Say she became sick while jogging to get exercise. Since she’s underage, it will create big problems for us.’”*<sup>23</sup>

—Florentino Bautista on the death of his fiancé Maria Isabel; she died two days later on May 14, 2008.

She was two months pregnant.

Over the past 50 years, two major forms of resistance to farm worker exploitation have taken form: one led by farmworkers themselves: farm worker unions, which aim to organize workers to fight for protection through legislative and regulatory reform; the other movement is led by consumers: fair trade, an effort to build into the price of goods the cost of equitable wages. The work of farm worker unions has resulted in many triumphs, for example requiring that employers provide shade, water, and restrooms, as well as mandatory breaks when the temperature rises above 85 degrees, and that some piece rate workers get paid for rest times. Fair trade has established an internationally recognized label as well as standards for certification with the goal of empowering farmers and workers through fair pay, better training, and opportunity for growth. However, despite these efforts, farmworkers remain some of the most exploited workers in the United States.

This paper is an attempt to evaluate examples of these two initiatives from an intersectional ecofeminist perspective to determine how they have succeeded and also fallen short of establishing just employment for farmworkers, and to build a framework for future movements based on the lessons learned. I will work to create a theoretical framework from which others can draw from to more effectively actualize sustainable change for farm workers and land laborers. In this evaluation, two key things stand out: a need for ecofeminism to reach

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<sup>23</sup> Jocelyn Sherman, “Remembering Maria Isabel Vasquez Jimenez on the 10-year Anniversary of Her Passing,” United Farm Workers, May 14, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190102012600/https://ufw.org/remembering-maria-isabel-vasquez-jimenez-on-the-10-year-anniversary-of-her-passing/> (accessed September 5, 2018).

beyond its roots of whiteness, and the value of a faith-based approach as the most powerful vehicle for change. Ecofeminism, with its emphasis on dualisms, power dynamics, systematic oppression, and respecting the earth, is an ideal alliance for farmworker movements. Liberation theology's portrayal of theology as praxis and reflection, as well as intersectional feminism's conceptual framework, provide both the faith-based catalyst for action and the structure for follow-through to address the systematic oppression faced by our neighbors in the fields.

## **1.2 Methodology**

I will draw on four components of intersectional ecofeminist thought to show why it is such a good alliance for farmworker movements. These components center around ecofeminism's major concerns and critiques: 1) hierarchal and dualistic thinking; 2) patriarchal power structures; 3) systemic racism; and 4) disregard for the earth. Next, I will then investigate and evaluate two farmworker movements: Fair Trade USA and United Farm Workers, from an intersectional ecofeminist perspective to determine what their successes and failures have been. Finally, I will use the lessons learned to create a framework for an 'ethic of land labor' based on intersectional ecofeminism—a framework from which more effective efforts can be launched.

### ***1.2.1 Two Notes on Statistics***

One note about statistics: statistics and data are an invaluable source when attempting to understand the breadth of an issue. However, getting accurate information about farmworkers is particularly challenging. These challenges center around two arenas: the challenge of compiling information and how the information is typically analyzed. In terms of collecting information, farmworkers have a highly mobile lifestyle—not only are they often in the country periodically,

returning to their home country for days, weeks, or years at a time, they also migrate within the United States, following harvest within or across state lines, although the pattern of migrating with the harvest is declining. Limited English proficiency is also a challenge, as well as varying levels of citizenship status, cultural barriers, and difficulties in classifying agricultural workers posed by the peak time and seasonality of the crop production process.<sup>24</sup> Even when data is collected, one ought to accept the numbers with some scrutiny. For example, one report in the Los Angeles Times shows a graph titled “farmworker pay soars,”<sup>25</sup> citing statistics from the bureau of labor statistics; however, when accounting for inflation, they actually have a decrease in pay.

A study by the Economic Policy Institute analyzed how the US Bureau of Labor Statistics calculates their numbers, determining that because many data houses base their information on yearly salaries, the numbers could be drastically skewed since most farm labor is highly seasonal. For example, some reports claim that farmworkers in California often make well over minimum wage, sometimes up to 40% more, but as Philip Marin and Daniel Costa acknowledge in their study, “most farmworker are not employed 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, so most earn far less than 30,000 per year.”<sup>26</sup> The Bureau of Labor Statistics, from the US Department of Labor, reports that in 2015, the annual salary for an agricultural worker was \$30,000.<sup>27</sup> However, how this number is calculated is grossly misguided. The number comes from when “employers report employment and wages when they pay unemployment insurance taxes, and these data are

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<sup>24</sup> National Center for Farmworker Health, “Agricultural Worker Demographics.”

<sup>25</sup> Natalie Kitroeff and Geoffrey Mohan, “Wages rise on California Farms. Americans Still Don’t Want the Job,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 2017 <https://web.archive.org/web/20190101214027/https://www.latimes.com/projects/la-fi-farms-immigration/> (accessed August 18, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> Martin and Costa, “Farmworker Wages in California.”

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

published as the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW).”<sup>28</sup> Accordingly to these numbers, in 2015, California employed an average of 421,300 workers and paid them a total of \$12.8 billion—\$30,300 per year for a full time equivalent (FTE) employee equivalent to \$14.60 an hour. However, because of how QCEW accounts for the number of workers employed, basing their average on one day a month, a problem arises because farmworkers often work for short periods of time—days or weeks. These companies are reporting total wages paid during the month but basing their average employment from reporting only those who were employed on one specific day during that month. “Dividing total wages by average employment reported in the QCEW generates the \$30,300 earnings of an FTE employee.”<sup>29</sup> This number is clearly skewed, creating the illusion that farmworkers earn a higher salary than they do in reality. Furthermore, when analyzing the Social Security Numbers reported by agricultural establishments, Martin and Costa found there were “848,000 unique SSNs in 2015, compared with 421,300 workers reported by the QCEW,” concluding that a farmworker’s average earnings were only \$17,500. This also does not take into account farmworkers employed by FLCs who usually receive lower than average wages.

This is just one example of how seemingly simple statistics can lead to an incorrect idea of reality. While the present paper does use statistics, they must be accepted with vigilance, and it should be kept in mind that they do not portray a complete picture of reality.

A second note on statistics: while they may frame an issue, for most people statistics do not incite action. As Larry Rasmussen wittily wrote, “few people will die for a pie chart.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6.

While data and statistics, however flawed, may be an indispensable tool in comprehending the extent of a situation, no data, “even the good data of sound science, do not of themselves upend habitual and cherished ways, including dysfunctional ones.”<sup>31</sup> Something more is needed. This paper turns to narrative as a more powerful tool for understanding and motivation. In order to do this, slices of narrative, in first person when possible, will be intermixed throughout the paper for the reader to gain a more intimate understanding of the issues, and because farmworkers are more than more than a number: telling their stories is one step towards acknowledging their work, their reality, and their worth. Drawing on ecofeminist and postcolonial theories of knowledge creation, particularly Gayatri Spivak, I acknowledge the necessity of marginalized voices in conversation. The voices of women and the oppressed are missing—they indeed cannot speak. I therefore make space to hear farmworkers speak for themselves about their own experiences.

### **1.3 Scope and Limitations**

#### ***1.3.1 About the Researcher***

As the author of this paper, I will position myself as a white ecofeminist writer with a Christian background. My target audience is middle to upper class people of faith who have the desire to do the work—whether starting an initiative at their church, spearheading movements for political change, or having a conversation with their sister or neighbor. I am also speaking specifically to white men and white women because many of the problems addressed in this paper originate from white western mentality. As such, much of the work to stop these problems falls on their shoulders, not to fix the problems experienced by farmworkers, but to stop the

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<sup>31</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth Honoring Faith*, 6.

cause of the injustices at their source. My goal is to provide people of faith with a rationale and guidelines for action. By action I mean not only outward social and political activism, but also the self-reflective work of understanding one's complicity in a system that benefits those in positions of privilege.

I am one of those that benefits from being in a position of privilege. I was born a white woman in the United States to well-educated parents in an upper middle-class community. I live and work in a county almost entirely supported by Latinx and Hispanic workers: the landscaping, public space maintenance, housekeeping both domestic and in hospitality, construction, and particularly the food industry are all dependent on Latinx workers. I have worked in the restaurant industry for over 10 years in Orange County and have seen first-hand the intimate involvement of these workers in every stage of food production, from warehouses to transportation, food preparation, cooking, serving, and finally washing the dishes. My view is limited, though, and only extends to the arrival of the food at the restaurant and some trips to the warehouses—I don't see the planting of seed, tending and pruning, harvesting of the fruits and vegetables, except in a glimpse on my commute. Yet what is visible to me is much more than what is visible to the average person sitting down to a Cesar salad at a restaurant or picking out produce at the supermarket.

From my experience, it seems that the more visible the worker is, the better they are treated and the more they are paid. Servers who have the most interaction with guests get paid the most through tips. Bussers and support staff receive little less, but they usually receive a portion of the customer's tip. Cooks don't interact with the guests directly but are often visible either through a window, which is a recent trend, or indirectly through the food presentation; while they don't typically receive tips, they usually earn more than minimum wage. Dishwashers

and prep workers get paid the least of anyone in the restaurant, but usually at least minimum wage. The workers furthest are those on the land, who are not even present where the food meets its culmination. They are least paid and the most forgotten. Proximity to the guests seems to be corelative to skin color too. One will often see white servers and sometimes bussers, and the Latinx servers are the pretty or handsome ones with good English and light skin. The workers in the back of the house—their skin is darker, and their accent sharper. Still further, one will rarely find a white person working in the fields.

The situation is a problem: it systematically disadvantages those who are least visible, and privileges those with visibility. I recognize my privilege as a white bartender, and my complicity in the system every time I don't correct a customer who blames a long wait time on the kitchen staff, or gives a sideways glance to the busser because their water glass isn't full. My goal in this paper is to shine a light on and lift up the less visible people in our food system who work just as hard, if not harder, than those at the table.

### ***1.3.2 About Farmworker Initiatives***

While seeking justice for farm workers is a global issue, this paper will focus on farmworkers in the United States. Additionally, a complete and comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of fair trade and labor unions lies outside the scope of this paper; rather this paper will address specifically the way these movements endorsed or neglected, and succeeded or failed to address the aforementioned tenets of ecofeminist thought.

Both farmworker unions and fair trade are broad-spectrum movements comprised of individual organizations targeting specific regions and specific issues. I will focus on Fair Trade USA, the largest initiative in the United States to address the global problem of underpaid

farmers, and United Farm Workers (UFW), the United States' first and largest farm workers union, operating in major western agricultural regions, primarily California.

#### **1.4 Organization of the Dissertation**

In Chapter 2, I will delve deeper into why ecofeminism is the best approach to address the challenges farmworkers face and what resources it has to do so. Each of the four themes: hierarchal and dualistic thinking, patriarchy and power, systemic racism, and disregard for the earth, will each be evaluated in terms of what it has to offer an ethic of farm labor.

Val Plumwood writes that dualisms—or socially constructed hierarchal relationships—justify continuing oppression and exploitation of those on the devalued side. Farmworkers often are located in the sharply demarcated and devalued sphere of otherness due to their race, social status, immigration status, and association with the earth. Dismantling the dualisms of consumer/producer, native/immigrant, civilized/barbaric, men/women, mind/body, science/nature will allow farmworkers freedom from being radically excluded.

I will also examine how patriarchy and the preservation of the ruling class is endorsed by many religious groups, despite intentions of working for justice. Both capitalism and religion have androcentric origins, and examining the role patriarchy plays in both religion and capitalism can lead to understanding how wealthy affluent people of faith are complicit in the system which exploits people and nature to satisfy and feed the higher classes. The food system was constructed off these principles, reinforcing the importance of rethinking patriarchal knowledge systems.

While systemic racism may not be explicitly a theme within ecofeminism, ecofeminism does endorse a commitment to be non-reductionistic. Val Plumwood explains, “the recognition



of a more complex dominator identity is...essential if feminism is not to repeat the mistakes of a reductionist programme such as Marxism, which treats one form of domination as central and aims to reduce all others to subsidiary forms of it which will 'wither away' once the 'fundamental' form is overcome."<sup>32</sup> If true sustainable progress is to be made, it will not happen by simply paying the farmworkers more. It is not just the domination of class, but race as well. Building on institutional racism, intersectionality is currently a growing movement within feminism, and can be understood as the importance of viewing each person's struggle as unique. Different forms of oppression are linked and can't be solved alone. Systemic racism a problem, and it is vital to address this issue outright instead of integrating it into a subheading of another subject.

Disregard for the earth is the final central critique of ecofeminism, and a key to understanding the farmworkers' position. If we view the earth as a tool to use, we will also view those who work on the earth as an extension of that tool. However, if we view the earth as a life force interconnected with all humanity, that perspective will cause farmworkers to be seen as a vital component in the sustaining of all life.

In Chapter 3, I will explore the first of two farmworker movements in light of the farm labor ideal, in order to learn what has worked and what has not. First, I will discuss the criteria I will use to evaluate the farmworker initiatives. These criteria will be based on the previous chapter's work. I will then evaluate two initiatives aimed at minimizing the mistreatment of farmworkers. It is vital to examine these two perspectives because they attempted to address similar issues from two different approaches. While fair trade is largely a top down trade-based

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<sup>32</sup> Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1994), 5.

approach, Chavez' *causa* was a bottom up grassroots movement aimed at legislative change. Understanding both of these approaches will give a balanced perspective.

I will evaluate Fair Trade USA, a former branch of Fairtrade International, because it is one the largest initiatives in the United States to address the problem of farmers being underpaid and exploited. Fairtrade International originated in 1988 as a collaboration between Dutch missionary in Latin America and Solidaridad (a group of Dutch Protestant churches), to provide labeling on certified products that met a higher standard. Additionally, because of the certification, these products could be tracked to ensure the premium charge was actually going to benefit the farmer at its origin. Today, Fair Trade USA advertises itself as an alternative approach to conventional trade based on a partnership between producers and consumers. Its goal is to empower farmers and farmworkers by providing them with fair wages, training about sustainable agriculture techniques, and opportunity for advancement. However, because it is based upon a model of the consumer helping the producer, and the help comes in the form of a higher price, it could be seen as reinforcing dualistic thinking between wealthy/poor and consumer/producer. It could also be critiqued for strengthening capitalist ideals which are based on people of color working to provide for wealthy white people. Furthermore, the charitable approach maintains the distance between consumers and farmworkers, and supports the idea that you can help from afar by simply opening your wallet.

In Chapter 4, I will explore United Farm Workers, an organization started in 1962 by Cesar Chavez and Delores Huerta. One of the original unions for farmworkers in the United States, they adopted the nonviolent strategies of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr, staged hunger strikes, boycotts, and protests. The UFW was successful in getting rest periods, improved safety precautions from pesticides, and other benefits like health care for farmworkers.

Despite their successes, Chavez and his colleagues faced many setbacks as well. While they brought attention to the issues, many of the problems still have not been addressed. I will examine the accomplishments, but also see what components led to the movement not maintaining its momentum. Finally, I will summarize the lessons learned: their successes and failures according to the aforementioned ecofeminist ideals.

In Chapter 5, I will bring together the four critiques of ecofeminism and the evaluation of two initiatives of farmworker justice, to build what I will call an ‘intersectional ecofeminist land labor ethic.’ An ethic of land labor is one that applies to all those who toil on the land as their livelihood including farmworkers, gardeners, landscapers, etc. Although not farmworkers, these groups face many of the same challenges of underpayment, poor working conditions, and lack of rights due to immigration status. The principles I set forth can be applied to these workers as well, which is why I believe ‘land labor’ is more appropriate than simply farm labor.

The four tenets of an intersectional ecofeminism ethic of land labor are that it must be *diverse* to challenge hierarchal and dualistic thinking, it must be *radical* to challenge patriarchal power structures, it must prioritize *solidarity* to understand the suffering of those unlike oneself, and it must be *enriching* to challenge the widescale disregard for the earth. The two vehicles for employing this ethic are faith and narrative: narrative to motivate and faith to direct.

Farmworker movements must be *diverse* in that they must view the multiplicity of issues farmworkers face and address them as both unique and interconnected; simply raising wages or providing food assistance will not solve the problem. It must take into consideration the whole person in the context of an interconnected earth community.

Land labor movements also must be *radical* to move beyond ideas originating within a patriarchal, capitalist mentality because their goal will always be to maintain the status quo and instead embrace knowledge and solutions originating from multiple sources, not discounting it because it comes from outside the dominant paradigm.

Land labor ethics prioritizes *solidarity*—working with, participating in, suffering alongside. It calls people to be part of the struggle, not simply to donate to or discuss hypothetically. This solidarity is not a state of mind but consists of confrontation even when it is uncomfortable, speaking out even when it'd be personally beneficial to stay silent, and sacrificing one's privilege when even when it'd be easier not to.

A land labor ethic is *enriching* through its respect for the earth, and views it not simply as a resource to be exploited for profit but understands that all people are united in that the wellbeing of humans is tied to the wellbeing of the earth. The goal must be shared abundance. Finally, faith and narrative provide the energy and direction behind this work. Narrative is a powerful motivator to incite action, and faith provides the guidelines and reflection for that action. Stories empower, they move, they bring the people alive and enable humans to connect: narrative is a powerful tool for change.

In terms of faith, the structure of this paper is modeled after liberation theology's understanding of theology as a three-part process: "the moment of praxis, the moment of reflection on praxis, and the moment of return to a renewed praxis."<sup>33</sup> The faith-based initiatives of fair trade and farmworker unions are the initial praxis, the ecofeminist evaluation is the reflection, and the ethical framework provided in Chapter 5 functions as guidelines for renewed

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<sup>33</sup> Zoe Bennett, "Action is the Life of All," in *Liberation Theology*, ed. Rowland, 39.

praxis. The power it will take to sustain this approach must have deep roots and draw from more than what cold economics and political doctrine can provide.<sup>34</sup>

In Chapter 6, I will offer some final thoughts including a summary of the arguments of this paper, potential critiques and limitations of my work, as well as areas for future research. My hope is that this paper will bring to the surface some of the underlying foundational issues that make farmworker justice such a challenging problem to solve, and that readers will undertake the self-reflective work and practical action within their communities to dismantle oppressive thinking and behaviors at the source.

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<sup>34</sup> Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Honoring Faith*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.

## CHAPTER 2:

### Ecofeminism as a Resource for Farmworker Justice

#### **2.1 Goals for this Chapter**

I have four goals in this chapter. First, I will define ecofeminism and intersectionality. Next, I will explore the role religion has in working towards a solution and also the ways in which it has contributed to the problem. Third, I will demonstrate why ecofeminism is a good ally for farmworkers by examining four central concerns of ecofeminism. Structuring this chapter around these four tenets will serve to 1) explore in depth the literature of ecofeminism and intersectionality, 2) show the specific arenas in which it is the best guide for farmworker justice, 3) highlight the religious beliefs ecofeminism has identified as harmful, and some new interpretations ecofeminists pose to overcome those harmful beliefs.

#### **2.2 Intersectional Ecofeminism**

What is intersectional ecofeminism? Intersectional ecofeminism means not solely focusing on getting organic products into high-end markets, but also fighting to eliminate food deserts. It means not just focusing on labeling GMO products for consumers, but also making sure workers on the farm are safe from pesticide residue. It means recognizing the “centrality of white female experiences in the conceptualization of gender discrimination,”<sup>1</sup> and working to change that.

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<sup>1</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989): 143.

The term intersectionality, while currently experiencing a surge in popularity especially in mainstream feminism, originated in 1989 from a paper written by civil rights activist Kimberlé Crenshaw. She used the concept of intersectionality to refer to the “multidimensionality of Black women’s experience,” and to critique the dominant conception of discrimination that disadvantage occurs along a single categorical axis.<sup>2</sup> Crenshaw argues that the lived experiences of Black women are much more complex than a single axis of understanding allows: a Black woman’s experience of discrimination may be gender-based, race-based, class-based, or any combination. Similarly, the discrimination faced by Maria Isabel that ultimately led to her death (the seventeen-year-old who died from heat complications discussed in the last chapter), should not be seen simply through a single axis lens of isolated gender discrimination; rather, intersectional ecofeminists view this situation through a lens that acknowledges the intersections of discrimination experienced by an Indigenous, migrant, underage, pregnant, female farmworker.<sup>3</sup>

The intersectional ecofeminism I’m advocating for moves beyond its origins of the women/nature connection, recognizing that the oppression of women and nature is deeply intertwined with racial and class-based oppression as well. Ecofeminists had been ‘doing intersectionality’ for many years before Crenshaw first explicitly defined it, A.E. Kings reminds

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<sup>2</sup> Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” 140.

<sup>3</sup> In this dissertation, I will capitalize the words “Black” and “Indigenous Peoples” as they refer to specific ethnic groups just as are Latinx or Hispanic. I will not capitalize “black” when referring to color or in direct quotations where it is not capitalized. I have consulted numerous authorities on this matter and believe the capitalization of both Black and Indigenous is preferable for this dissertation. According to the Chicago Manual of Style Section 8.39, “Common designations of ethnic groups by color are usually lower-cased unless a particular publisher or author prefers otherwise.” Because this dissertation deals with the marginalization of people of color, I do prefer to capitalize to show respect and acknowledge the existence of the African diaspora. For more information, see Merrill Perlman, “Black and White: Why Capitalization Matters,” *Colombia Journalism Review*, June 23, 2015, [https://web.archive.org/web/20190212010026/https://www.cjr.org/analysis/language\\_corner\\_1.php](https://web.archive.org/web/20190212010026/https://www.cjr.org/analysis/language_corner_1.php), accessed Feb 9, 2019), as well as Lori L. Tharps, “The Case for Black with a Capital B,” *The New York Times*, Nov 18, 2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190212010249/https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/19/opinion/the-case-for-black-with-a-capital-b.html>, accessed Feb 9, 2019.

us;<sup>4</sup> however, locating oneself specifically within intersectional ecofeminism makes addressing these issues a foremost commitment rather than an afterthought.

Ecofeminists believe that the liberation of women cannot be achieved without also freeing nature from exploitation—that their oppressions are intertwined. It might seem unlikely that a field focused on the empowerment of women would be a likely ally for a body of workers most of whom are men, however, the same system that subordinates women and nature also dominates people of color and class. Following the logic of Audre Lorde, “any attack against lesbians and gays is a Black issue, because thousands of lesbians and gay men are Black.” It follows that any attack against farmworkers is a woman’s issue because thousands of farmworkers are women, and any attack against Latinx people is a woman’s issue because millions of Latinx people are women. Ecofeminists seeking justice for women and for nature must also fight against racism: “there can be no hierarchies of oppression.”<sup>5</sup>

A central tenet at the foundation of ecofeminism is that “there are important connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature, an understanding of which is crucial to feminism, environmentalism, and environmental philosophy.”<sup>6</sup> Intersectional ecofeminists, then, would extend this to say that there are important connections between the domination of women, nature, and race,<sup>7</sup> an understanding of which is crucial to feminism and all related disciplines. A main project of intersectional ecofeminism is to make visible these woman-nature-race connections, and where harmful, dismantle them.

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<sup>4</sup> A.E. Kings, “Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism,” *Ethics and the Environment* 22, no. 1 (2017), 70.

<sup>5</sup> Audre Lorde, “There is No Hierarchy of Oppressions,” in *I Am Your Sister*, edited by Rudolph P. Byrd, Johnnetta Betsch Cole, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 220.

<sup>6</sup> Karen Warren, Introduction to Chapter 2 of *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, 253-267 (New York: Pearson, 2004), 256.

<sup>7</sup> For the purpose of this paper I will focus mostly on race and somewhat on class as those categories are the most relevant to farmworkers, though similar connections could be made to other marginalized groups.



In this chapter I will look deeper into intersectional ecofeminism, and why its components lend themselves to farmworker activism. I will focus on four components: dismantling hierarchal and dualistic value systems, acknowledging the role patriarchy and power dynamics play in today's food system, exposing systemic racism, and finally, cultivating care for the earth. These themes will set the stage for a critique of farmworker justice initiatives.

## **2.3 Religion and Ecofeminism**

### ***2.3.1 Religion as an Intervention***

The problem at hand—the challenges farmworkers face—is not typically seen as one religion can solve, however using religion as an intervention may provide some insight at a way forward. At first glance, the death of a farmworker in a field due to heat may seem like a problem dealing with training for supervisors, or water transportation logistics, labor laws, or even worker health. However, the problem lies deeper. Of course these things play a role, but the chronic problem of farmworkers dying from heat stroke is the direct result of the Western system of production in which the powerful control the production and distribution of food to the privileged, by depending on the exploitation of laborers and the earth on an increasingly *undependable* planet where both the ecological systems and labor forces are reaching a breaking point. This type of problem won't be solved by something as simple as supervisor training, or even as complex as labor laws; instead these problems force us to confront foundational belief systems, and this can be done through religion.

Following the words of Bill McKibben and Larry Rasmussen, our planet is in a “tough, new place.”<sup>8</sup> The effects of unrestrained pursuit of capital on the planet are measurable: glacial

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<sup>8</sup> Bill McKibben, *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2011), 4.

retreat, the increasing prevalence of extreme weather events, and ocean acidification are just a couple examples. However, the effects of large scale exploitation of populations are less easily measurable. Chronic oppression of a people does impact the overall wellbeing of society, and the insidious effects can be seen in the breakdown of communities and the prevalence of violence. These problems reach far into different disciplines beyond economics or ecology and are seated deeper than policy or law, they're ingrained in culture and tradition. Science won't solve the problem alone, but we do, as Rasmussen reminds us, have at our disposal "traditions for transformation...with the moral authority to shape lives both inwardly and outwardly; traditions rooted in patterns of death and renewal, birth and rebirth."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, he's talking about the world's religions. That is not to say there is no role for science, legislation, or economics—they certainly bring vital contributions in terms of data, policies, and praxis. Yet, "few people will die for a pie chart."<sup>10</sup> He continues:

Data, even the good data of sound science, do not of themselves uphold habitual and cherished ways, including dysfunctional ones. Nor do big ideas about how things work. Something with more tenacity, commitment, and loyalty; something with a reach deep enough to summon sacrifice; something that lays claim to cosmic meaning and locates us in communities that transcend our egos and surpass our modest moment in time...some such power as this needs to join all that good science and good technology bring.<sup>11</sup>

It is undeniable that our habitual ways are hard-set. We will truly need some powerful motivator for change, and many argue that religion may be this motivator.

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<sup>9</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth Honoring Faith*, 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> Rasmussen, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Turning to religion to solve a large-scale problem such as this may seem natural to those within faith communities, however, those who aren't may be hesitant to turn to religious ideals. However, Rasmussen reminds us that religion knows the things that move people: fear and love. Religion knows these things well, and we would be foolish to dismiss it.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, religions are the carriers of moral values, and can bring the cultivation of reverence, love, empathy, and a mandate to act ecologically and morally.<sup>13</sup> Faith plays a major role in the decision-making of Christians. Religion provides grounds for this faith-based intervention aimed specifically at changing behavior of Christians towards the 'other' present in their daily lives. Because of the importance of faith, this change has the potential to become deeply ingrained in the lives of individuals and communities. Ultimately, religion is a resource for intervention, a powerful force to change behavior, and provides moral grounds not just sanctioning this change but necessitating it.

I turn to religion, specifically some key themes in Christian liberation theology, to provide a basis for a faith-based intervention with the goal of Christians more fully engaging in action that accompanies theology. I draw on the work of Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz for an understanding of liberation theology and its connection to liberative action that addresses structural sin and causes foundational change. Liberation theology calls Christians to do theology—to act, reflect, then reorient our action. Isasi-Diaz's writings are based on her own lived experiences of *lo cotidiano*, the day-to-day reality in which Latinas lived-experience is enmeshed, and as such, provide a valuable and relevant connection between life and faith that is often missing from traditional theology.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 80.

Three ideas from Isasi-Diaz's *mujerista* theology provide a valuable foundation for the current discussion: personal and structural sin, solidarity, and a reinterpretation of the call to love one's neighbor. Building on Gutierrez' liberation theology, Isasi-Diaz defines *mujerista* theology as liberative praxis: doing liberation theology is reflective action in the struggle for the liberation of Latina women and communities.<sup>14</sup> Similar to *mujerista* theology, womanist theology also draws on the lack of attention to everyday realities of women of color, specifically Black women. Its goal is also to work towards liberation from the oppressions unique to women of color, though because the present paper deals primarily with Latinx workers, the focus will be on their experience. For Isasi-Diaz, theology is praxis, since thinking cannot be separated from acting. As a result, theology plays a role in motivation for action, the appropriate type of action, as well as the reason for doing it. Isasi-Diaz explains the connection between sin, solidarity, and the theological call to action:

The main obstacle to the unfolding of the kin-dom is the alienation from God and from each other experienced by all in and through the oppressive societal categories and structures that cause and sustain oppression. This alienation is what we refer to as sin, both personal sin and structural sin... It is a concrete historical reality brought about and sustained by personal behavior that is institutionalized and sanctioned by societal norms. Sin appears, therefore, as the fundamental alienation, the root of a situation of injustice and exploitation. To struggle against oppression, against alienation, is a matter of an ongoing personal conversion that involves effective attempts to change alienating societal structures. This personal conversion cannot happen apart from solidarity with the oppressed.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 90.

The vital component here is the connection between recognizing that our actions are alienating and thus sinful, and then making a commitment to address this fundamental source of injustice through personal conversion brought about by engaging in solidarity with the oppressed. This recognition of one's complicity in oppression and commitment to further action is at the heart of this paper, and also forms the basis of liberation theology.

Isasi-Diaz also explains what solidarity with the oppressed truly means, as there are some misconceptions about the term. Solidarity has been misunderstood. It has been understood to mean a disposition, something one can have for a while but can then put aside until they are ready to pick it up again. This is not solidarity. She is also concerned that solidarity has come to mean 'agreement with,' and is seen as "an ephemeral sense of supporting others that has little or nothing to do with liberative praxis."<sup>16</sup> Salvation is also not charity—it is not a one-sided giving of abundance. Rather, solidarity is "an expression of the gospel mandate to love the neighbor."<sup>17</sup> It is a being with the other in their suffering and the goal of Christianity. Two aspects of this conception of solidarity make it particularly valuable for understanding the upcoming section on solidarity as a response to systemic oppression. First is the idea that solidarity is not a doing for others but a being with others in their suffering, and the second is that solidarity is liberative praxis in the form of loving one's neighbor.

Isasi-Diaz reconceptualizes what it means to love one's neighbor too. She calls for a paradigm shift which identifies solidarity as the appropriate expression of the gospel mandate to love our neighbor.<sup>18</sup> She also reminds us that one's neighbor is not only someone who lives near us, looks like us, and experiences the world like us. According to Matthew 25, our neighbor is

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<sup>16</sup> Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 87.

<sup>17</sup> Isasi-Diaz, 89.

<sup>18</sup> Isasi-Diaz, 88.

the least of our sisters and brothers, the poor and the oppressed. Christians must take seriously the call to love their neighbor and engage in the concrete action and theological reflection their faith requires.

### ***2.3.2 Religious Roots of the Problem***

If we are going to attempt to uncover what solutions faith traditions can provide to the problems farmworkers face, we must first make a serious examination of the ways in which faith traditions have contributed to the problem in the first place, whether intentionally, unintentionally, currently, or historically.

In *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*, Rosemary Radford Ruether looks to a seminal paper by Lynn White who argues that the Christian religion has played a major role in Western civilization's disregard for nature.<sup>19</sup> White looks specifically to the biblical phrase in Genesis 1:26: "let man have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." White makes the claim that this piece of scripture is the source of "unbridled mastery" over nature which has led to our ecological crisis. For our current discussion about farmworkers and the challenges they face, this premise is important for two reasons: 1) the dominion over all the earth that man was granted has been extended to justify dominion not only of the earth and animals, but anyone associated with the natural world, embedded in it, or who tends to it; 2) as White notes, the unbridled mastery over nature is the root of the ecological

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<sup>19</sup> Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism*. 45. The Christian creation story not only contributes to a disregard for nature but for women as well. In the creation story of Adam and Eve, their expulsion from paradise is blamed on the woman.

crisis, however, this unbridled mastery affects farmworkers, women, indigenous populations, and those of lower socioeconomic class in a very different, more intimate ,and detrimental way.

Two examples illustrate this point. First, it can be seen how this dominion was extended beyond nature to people during colonization when the native inhabitants were seen more as part of the habitat that was ‘discovered’ than as people inhabiting a place. This resulted in the colonizers becoming the master over native people as well as their land. A good example of this is the silver mining operations in Potosí (now in Bolivia) where through dynamite and *mita* (indigenous slave labor), the Spanish stripped the mountain’s veins of silver extracting enough, by some enthusiastic estimates, to build a silver bridge all the way to Spain.<sup>20</sup> While imaginative, this estimate is not far from the truth, as actual data estimates that over 16,000,000 kilograms of silver arrived at the Spanish port of Sanlúcar de Barrameda between 1503 and 1660. This extensive mining was made possible by forced slave labor of indigenous people and resulted in an estimated 8 million deaths at Potosí’s Cerro Rico.<sup>21</sup>

An example with respect to the second reason of how mastery of nature affects those closer to the land more severely, is how the attempt at mastery over water systems affects both the earth and vulnerable populations in the region: farmers, the poor, women, and children. The creation of dams and reservoirs as an attempt to control river flow and irrigation has drastic consequences for the earth and subsequently populations who depend on the land. Dams and reservoirs can lead to the growth of toxic algae which often renders the water undrinkable and unable to sustain life, killing off fisheries on which native populations depend. They also increase evaporation due to the larger surface area exposed to the sun, a problem for areas

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<sup>20</sup> Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997), 22-23.

<sup>21</sup> Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America*, 32, 39.

experiencing drought. Finally, the increased salinity ruins farmland in the surrounding areas, displacing not only those whose homes were in the new body of water, but in the entire region. These problems are particularly acute in areas where large populations are dependent on the rivers for fish, farming, and drinking water. Vandana Shiva explains how the mastery over water systems in India that stemmed from Western influence of the Green Revolution “leads to a destruction of irrigated agriculture in the river valley and turns skilled farmers into unskilled refugees.”<sup>22</sup> It is farmers, women, the poor, and indigenous populations who are most adversely affected by attempts to master nature.

The above depiction about man’s dominion is just one example. There are many more. The problems farmworkers face can be linked to Christian ideas. That is not to say that Christianity is the only thing to blame. Certainly, corporate greed and personal failings play a role too. However, Christian communities must recognize that in order to be part of the solution, they must first recognize the ways, conscious or not, in which their religion and their personal convictions and behavior are complicit, and how they may be contributing to the present situation. Once these issues are addressed, it may be easier to see a way forward. While White suggests that we must reject the Christian belief that nature purpose is to serve man, he does not hold that Christianity must be rejected altogether. Instead, he claims, “since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not,” and looks to Saint Francis of Assisi’s “alternative Christian view of nature and man’s relation to it” as an example for a way forward.<sup>23</sup>

Of the world’s primary faith traditions, none are blameless in contributing to problems of the environment and oppression. However, in the present paper, I will address primarily the

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<sup>22</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (Boston: Staying Alive, 2010), 189.

<sup>23</sup> Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967), 1207.



impact of the Christian religion. While there is much to be said about other traditions, I will focus on Christianity because I come from within that tradition, and also because, as Ruether acknowledges, “Christianity, as the religious basis of Western civilization, has been a primary agent of creating and spreading the ecological crisis throughout the world, as it has had the most influence.”<sup>24</sup> An area for future research would be to examine the role other faith traditions play in perpetuating oppressive systems. The remainder of this chapter will address how the work of ecofeminism around the four core critiques can be a resource for farmworkers.

## **2.4 Hierarchal and Dualistic Value Systems**

### ***2.4.1 Origins: Connections Between Women and Nature***

Karen Warren calls woman-nature connections the “backbone of ecofeminism.”<sup>25</sup> She identifies several sorts of connections, four of which I will examine in depth, first with regard to the connections between women and nature, and then how the nature connection applies to race as well. The connections are historical, conceptual, empirical, and symbolic.

The first connection I will address between women and nature is historical, and as a result, also causal, leading to the perpetuation of this connection and the challenges of separating them. Historically, women and nature are connected, and “when historical data are used to generate theories concerning the sources of the dominations of women and nature, it is also causal.”<sup>26</sup>

Carolyn Merchant argues that the affiliation between women and nature persists throughout history, culture, and language. Historically, nature was viewed as female. In ancient

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<sup>24</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Religious Ecofeminism: Healing the Ecological Crisis,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb, 263-275 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 363.

<sup>25</sup> Warren, *Environmental Philosophy*: 257.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

times, nature was seen as a nurturing mother: ‘mother nature’ was an interconnected living feminine being: wood nymphs filled the forest, hunter goddess Diana ruled over the woodlands, the natural world was synonymous with Virgin. But nature also had a different side: disorder; and she could just as easily be seen as wild, uncontrollable chaos. This feminine force ruled over the uncontrollable aspects of nature: plague, famines, floods; it destroyed crops and killed people. She was symbolized by the witch. For example, the Hawaiian goddess Pele was the goddess of the volcano, sporadically erupting and spewing lava, called Pele’s hair. Similarly, Pele’s sister, Namakaokahai, the goddess of the sea is equally fierce, thought to control tides, floods, and waves. The two chief male gods, on the other hand, are Kahoai the god of sorcery and Ku the god of war—sorcery and war are not associated with nature, but rather are human inventions.

Merchant continues, that during the Industrial Revolution, the western understanding of nature changed from organism to machine, which led to the domination over nature and by extension, the domination over the feminine through the concepts of order and power.<sup>27</sup> Prior to the Industrial Revolution, nature was seen as a living mother which cultivated a value system based on respect; however, the new framework of order and power had values compatible with capitalism. And thus, the masculine identity developed not only as the harbinger of power and order but also through the negation of the female and of nature as well. This historical/causal theme is so strong that Ariel Salleh uses it to define the field: “ecofeminism is a recent development in feminist thought which argues that the current global environmental crisis is a predictable outcome of patriarchal culture.”<sup>28</sup> Below I will examine how the industrial revolution

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<sup>27</sup> Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper One, 1990), xxi.

<sup>28</sup> Ariel Salleh, “Epistemology and the Metaphors of Production: An Eco-feminist Reading of Critical Theory,” *Studies in Humanities* 5 no. 2 (1988): 134.

not only resulted in a system of thought justifying the domination of women, but how it is inextricably linked with the rise of colonialism and the worldview which justifies the domination of non-white races as well.

The second connection between women and nature is conceptual, meaning, they are “located in conceptual structures of domination that construct women and nature in male-biased ways.”<sup>29</sup> This plays out through value dualisms: within pairs one side is seen as oppositional and excluded; and value hierarchies: perceptions of diversity organized vertically, and giving status and prestige to that which is higher up.<sup>30</sup> For example, common hierarchal dualisms in the Western European worldview are mind/body, male/female, reason/nature, where the first group of mind, male, and reason, are championed, and the latter concepts of body, female, and nature are denigrated. Furthermore, many feminists argue that these hierarchal dualisms are sheltered within larger oppressive conceptual frameworks for example, racism, sexism, classism, and thus built into our socially constructed belief system, values, and attitudes.<sup>31</sup>

Val Plumwood defines dualisms as the construction of a devalued and sharply demarcated sphere of otherness characterized by radical exclusion, distancing, and oppression.<sup>32</sup> It is not simply a differentiation, but a radical exclusion of that which is within the sphere of otherness. These dualisms, she argues, develop from a denied dependency on a subordinated other. This denied dependency shapes the identity of both the dominated and subordinated. Drawing from gender, race, and colonization, she shows how it is not simply masculine identity

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<sup>29</sup> Karen Warren, “Ecological Feminist Philosophies: An Overview of the Issues,” in *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*, ed. Karen Warren, ix-xxvi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), xi.

<sup>30</sup> Warren, “Ecological Feminist Philosophies,” xii.

<sup>31</sup> Warren, *Environmental Philosophy*: 260.

<sup>32</sup> Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 41.

but rather the “identity of the master” that lies at the heart of western culture.<sup>33</sup> This master identity expresses itself in the dominant forms of reason.

Furthermore, dualisms are also a type of differentiation, where “power constructs difference in terms of an inferior and alien realm.”<sup>34</sup> It is a very specific and strategic type of differentiation associated with domination and accumulation, as well as their justifications.<sup>35</sup> Some examples are below:

Man/woman	Civilized/primitive
Self/other	Culture/nature
Mind/body	Active/passive
Public/private	Reason/nature
Master/slave	Universal/particular

These differences are not simply set aside, but radically ostracized and excluded. The reason for this, is that in order for a group of people to be completely dominated, it must appear to be natural, that it is simply the order of things. Slavery or colonization could not have occurred without the notion that there is a hierarchy of existence—that some groups are meant to dominate. Marilyn Frye explains how this domination becomes commonplace:

For efficient subordination, what’s wanted is that the structure not only not appear to be a cultural artifact kept in place by human decision or custom, but that it appear to be natural...beyond the scope of human manipulation or revision. It must seem natural that individuals of the one category are dominated by individuals of the other and that as groups, the one dominates the other.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 42.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1983), 34.

The third connection is empirical/experiential connection. People of color and people of lower socioeconomic class experience more drastically and more intimately environmental destruction. Women, especially women in the developing world are disproportionately affected as a result of the mistreatment of nature and the resulting ecological consequences.<sup>37</sup> Empirical data regarding radiation levels and toxins in soil, development policies that prevent women from adequately providing for their families, and the negative effects of practices like factory farming are all linked to patriarchal ideas. These practices directly affect the experience of women and other traditionally disadvantaged groups such as children and Indigenous Peoples, and the empirical data shows these affects are significant.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, women and nature are connected symbolically. Even today, nature is described in feminine terms: women are referred to as foxes, bitches, cougars, old bats, pussies; seeking sex is likened to hunting; men ‘hunger’ for sex, or take a woman ‘off the market,’ and if he ‘buys the cow’ he ‘gets the milk for free.’ Similarly, nature is feminized: the earth is referred to as mother nature, the land can be raped, conquered, or mined; there is virgin timber, fertile soil, and barren land. These symbols are so pervasive, they exist within language and imagery, reinforcing the connection between women and the natural world. This is problematic because these symbols also reinforce the idea that both women and nature are passive non-actors and it perpetuates as well as justifies their domination. Ultimately, all these connections between women and nature reinforce dominance over them, and make it appear that their subordination to dominating systems is not only natural but right.

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<sup>37</sup> Warren, “Ecological Feminist Philosophies,” xiii.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

### ***2.4.2 Religion's Contribution to Hierarchal Dualisms***

Hierarchal relationships are prevalent throughout religion, particularly Western Christianity. This makes the challenge of recognizing and dismantling hierarchal relationships today, such as those in the food system, particularly difficult. Built on the foundation of Hebraic scripture interpreted through a Platonic worldview, Christianity developed to be centered around the dualistic notions of soul/body, God/nature, male/female. These concepts were used as a way of teaching about the relationship between humanity and God, however, they have also served to substantiate and reinforce man's right to dominate over women and the earth. This connection of man's likeness to God and the soul, and women's likeness to the earth and to sins of the physical body, clearly places men in a superior position. It is this system of hierarchies that gives those at the top power, and supports the patriarchal system that is the chief point of contention of ecofeminism. Addressing the first ecofeminist theme of hierarchies, I will examine the origin of the idea, namely the Genesis story (the woman being created after, and for the man, and also being the one to introduce sin into the world), while in the next theme on patriarchy, I will look more into how these ideas were perpetuated and reinforced through biblical passages and practices that show women as inferior.

The creation story causes women to be viewed as inferior, sinful, and associated with the earth in three ways. First, through the Genesis creation story's interpretation from a Platonic viewpoint, second, through Eve's being created out of Adam to serve him, and third, Eve's disobedience resulting in the original sin and Fall.

The creation story in Genesis was interpreted through a platonic worldview, leading to the association of women with the physical realm and with sin. The Platonic creation story, the *Timaeus*, demonstrates the underlying "presupposition of a patriarchal dualism as the

foundational nature of things,”<sup>39</sup> which is expressed through the dualism of mind over matter. The mind, consciousness, or soul is fundamentally good and eternal, and is living in an alienated state on earth attached to the secondary, lesser derivative: the body. The body is the source of evil and must be mastered by the mind.<sup>40</sup> It is clear, then, how this line of thought influenced the interpretation of the story in Genesis: “Christianity imaged the soul in relation to the body as male controlling power over female-identified body and passions that are to be controlled.”<sup>41</sup>

The understanding of women as inferior is compounded with the creation of Eve. The male is the original human, and out of him, God (who is also male) creates a female as a wife-servant. Ruether emphasizes that this means that “the male is the normative human, and the female a derivative auxiliary.”<sup>42</sup> Finally, according to Genesis 3, it was the woman who was disobedient to God’s command and caused not only the introduction of sin into the world but also for them to be exiled from paradise and to live a cursed existence. This fall blames the woman for the struggles of humankind, and even more disturbing, places the woman’s redemption in her subordinating herself to men,<sup>43</sup> solidifying her identity as linked with both nature and sin.

In addition to the hierarchy of male over female, ideas from the biblical creation story, specifically references to the curse of Ham and the mark of Cain, have been used by slaveholders to justify a biblical endorsement of slavery. Molly Oshatz explains how this creation story is used to justify racial slavery. In the Genesis story, after drinking some wine, Noah passes out

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<sup>39</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Ecofeminism—The Challenge to Theology,” *Deportate Esuli Profughe* 20 (2012): 23.

<sup>40</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper One, 1994), 24.

<sup>41</sup> Ruether, “Ecofeminism—The Challenge to Theology,” 25.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism with World Religions*, 62.

naked in his tent and his son Ham sees “the nakedness of his father,” and when Noah wakes up and learns “what his youngest son had done to him,” he curses him and his son Canaan: “Cursed be Canaan! Lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers.” Oshatz marks this passage as a clear establishment of slavery as a punishment for a transgression.<sup>44</sup> In the sixteenth century, it became commonplace to interpret this curse as a curse of races, and Antebellum defenders of slavery used the curse of Ham and Canaan to justify their enslavement of Black Africans.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, in Genesis 4, the son of Adam and Eve, Cain, lied to God about killing his brother Abel, and the Lord put a curse on Cain, put a mark on him to ensure his suffering, and drove him from the land.<sup>46</sup> This mark has been associated with blackness by proslavery groups and used as another example for biblical justification of racial hierarchy. However, Oshatz emphasizes that this identification of Africans as the subject of the curse is incorrect, and that Africans are not the progenitors of Canaan.<sup>47</sup> Yet biblical justifications, however weak, have been powerful forces in justifying and maintaining the idea of racial hierarchies.

From the platonic perspective, this hierarchy of mind/body is duplicated in the hierarchy of male over female, white over black, and also in the class hierarchy of rulers over workers. This is compounded when the woman-worker is associated with the natural world, the epitome of which is the female farmworkers. Male farmworkers who are also people of color fall into this subordinated status too, as their association with the earth, and their status as a non-white worker strips them of power.

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<sup>44</sup> Molly Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin: The Fight against Slavery and the Rise of Liberal Protestantism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

<sup>45</sup> Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin*, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Genesis 4: 9-15

<sup>47</sup> Oshatz, 22.



Despite the major role Christianity has had in the adoption of harmful hierarchal dualisms that elevate men over women and nature, ecofeminist theologians claim there are redeeming factors within Christianity that can reclaim women's agency, promote healthy ecological relations, and reconcile relationships with the radically excluded 'other.' Furthermore, these principles can be extended to address the damaged relationships with subordinated farmworkers as well.

One method of reclaiming Christianity for women and other historically subordinated groups is a re-understanding of the faith. This may take the form of changing one's understanding of 'God the Father' to God as feminine Mother, or changing gendered language in the Bible. Ruether goes further to suggest that a dualistic worldview actually distorts the intended Hebraic understanding of the Bible,<sup>48</sup> suggesting that a deeper re-understanding of the faith is needed. One must be aware of how these value systems operate to oppress, especially undetected within the structures that people often turn to for solutions. Awareness is only the first step that is needed in order to dismantle these structures and rectify the injustices that occur as a result.

The position that many farmworkers find themselves in today is a direct result of these universal value systems which prioritize everything they are not. Using an intersectional ecofeminist viewpoint to better understand the structures that enforce their subjugation is key to being able to work towards any type of justice. Furthermore, this viewpoint clarifies that the real issue is not that workers are paid so little that they are unable to participate as full members of society, it is *because* they are not considered equally valuable members of society that their terrible pay and conditions are overlooked. Understanding this perspective generates a shift in

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<sup>48</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Dualism and the Nature of Evil in Feminist Theology," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 5, no. 1 (1992), 36.

where energy must be directed to solve the problem: it is not the poor pay that must be addressed but rather societal attitudes.

Intersectional ecofeminism is a significant resource in this respect because its critique of dualistic value systems gives some insight as to the real reasons these and similar oppressions exist, rather than it being framed as an issue of economics or global markets. Understanding the root cause of why the problem exists is paramount to suggesting any functional solution. Any initiative aimed at farmworker justice that does not consider the root cause will be ineffective.

## **2.5 Patriarchy and Power**

### ***2.5.1 Origins: The Rise of Patriarchy***

There is a strong link between the rise of patriarchy, colonization, and capitalism—specifically between the forms of oppression that allow each to function. A brief look at the theories of the origin of patriarchy and the resulting power systems may be helpful in understanding the ways in which farmworkers are still subject to patriarchal power systems, specifically in agriculture. Combining the perspectives of both postcolonial and ecofeminist thought creates a strong case linking patriarchy with the forms of domination practiced in agricultural labor today.

Many theorists believe that ancient cultures were mostly matricentric. As society became more pastoral, a new mode of production based on coercion and control began to evolve, particularly with respect to the reproduction of animals. Coupled with the development of the plow, which required more strength to use, the importance of ‘gathering,’ generally a women’s task, declined and women became more relegated to the home. The resulting surplus of food led to a surplus of time for men to dedicate to the ‘art of war’ and also to pursue what Mark

Hathaway and Leonardo Boff call predatory production: usurping the production of another village as opposed to spending one's own village resources on food production.<sup>49</sup> This led to taking wealth from other areas of land, which eventually took the form of colonization.

Hathaway and Boff argue that modern capitalism represents the most sophisticated and exploitative form of this patriarchal system.<sup>50</sup> This primitive accumulation of capital that formed the foundations of our modern capitalist economy was only possible because of the use of power, force, and coercion exerted over people of color, those in the Global South, women, and the Other. This “unified system of [male] domination and exploitation, served as a foundation upon which capitalism would be built.”<sup>51</sup>

Not only did patriarchal systems develop along with practices of predatory production which together led to colonialism and eventually capitalism, but the development of these power systems also resulted in the decline of the role and importance of the food-grower, instead prioritizing the much more efficient food-stealer. The emergence of capitalism on agricultural production resulted in women's work and knowledge being devalued in favor of man's mechanistic and universal prescriptions. Subsistence farming was devalued along with women's role in agriculture and during the same time period much land was seized from indigenous control, which typically involved women and instead became colonial territories on which slaves became the laborers.

With respect to the modern US food system, monocropping, large farms, and the dependence on a large disposable labor force are all remnants of the patriarchal system which found its outlet in colonialism, and continues as a form of neocolonialism. Observing the current

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<sup>49</sup> Mark Hathaway and Leonardo Boff, *The Tao of Liberation: Exploring the Ecology of Transformation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009), 71.

<sup>50</sup> Hathaway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 72.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

agricultural system in California, one can see predatory production still happening: the United States annexed the land of California from Mexican control, and now Mexican workers are paid next to nothing to work the land to produce food which will be sold to Mexico for a profit.

Our food system is based on “extractive, non-reciprocal, exploitative object-relation to nature, first established between men and women and men and nature.”<sup>52</sup> The development of our food system and especially the labor to sustain our food system is intimately tied to the development of capitalism and patriarchy.

### ***2.5.2 Religion’s Support of the Patriarchy***

Ruether claims that of all the world’s faith traditions, Christianity is perhaps the most patriarchal and as a result the most harmful for women. The one and only God is personified as a male and is referred to with male pronouns (i.e.: He, Father). In addition, Jesus, the incarnation of God, takes the form of a male as well. The Christian creation story is also harmful for women because the story of Eve in that redemption for women consists of accepting subordination to a male. Patriarchy has also played a large role in not just the origins of the Christian religion, but how it has played out, particularly in the church: only men can be ordained in the Catholic Church, and until recently, only men could hold leadership positions within the church in many other denominations. There are many other ways in which the Christian faith has supported patriarchy, some of which have been addressed in the prior section.

Similar to hierarchal value systems, understanding the role of patriarchy and the ways in which it has caused exploitative practices of our food system is vital before embarking on any type of mission to address the problems. Before one attempts to solve a problem, one must know

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<sup>52</sup> Hathaway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 74.

what the problem is: it is not because of a language barrier or some inherent skill of cutting lettuce that is the reasons immigrants and people of color are the ones laboring in the fields; it is because the system was built to use the labor of Others to produce food for one's own people and the US food system is staying true to this course. Work with the land has been devalued, and any initiative for farmworker justice must acknowledge the problem that we do not value the growth of food or those who grow it.

The critique of patriarchal systems of power is an enormous resource for farmworker justice because it is currently another form of predatory production. Dismantling systems of power and control in the food system—a system meant to nourish and sustain growth is a key component in establishing any justice-based initiative for farmworkers. We must not turn a blind eye to the complicity of men and of affluent western nations that have benefited and continue to benefit from this ongoing predatory production of food.

## **2.6 Systemic Racism**

### ***2.6.1 Origins: Race, Women, and Nature***

Building on the connections between women and nature in the earlier section, one can see that the experience of being a woman takes on another dimension when that experience is one of a woman of color. The connection between women and nature is not isolated: people of color are often described in ways that mirror nature as well. The language, especially the language from the colonial era describes the colonized in animalistic terms. In the same way that language links women and nature, language also links people of color and nature too, justifying and perpetuating dominance over non-white European people.

In each sort of connection between women and nature outlined above, there are also similar parallels between people of color and nature. The same systems that exploit both women and nature also exploit people of color. For example, linguistic patterns can be used to show how the same language is used to describe women and the earth, sending the message that women and nature are an inherently alienated entity. This idea justifies their control, manipulation, and exploitation.

Historically, language likens the colonized peoples with the natural world: something to be controlled, coerced—something inhuman. The colonized were dehumanized, called savages, barbaric, and beastly. Franz Fanon describes the terms that settlers used when describing natives, noting many of the terms were zoological: “the yellow man’s reptilian motions,” “breeding swarms” “stink of the native quarter.”<sup>53</sup> Even today, one need only to open the newspaper to hear about tennis player Serena Williams’ “piranha mentality,”<sup>54</sup> “savage strokes,” or “gorilla effect.” An ESPN commentator literally called her an “animal,” remarking that she and her sister would be more likely featured in *National Geographic* than in *Playboy*.<sup>55</sup>

Building on the hierarchal dualistic value systems from above and applying them to race, the colonial period was characterized by the hyperseparation and oppression of Native peoples, the justification of which lay in the sometimes subtle, sometimes outright framing with likeness to the natural world. Juxtaposing the ‘savage native’ with the ‘civilized settler’ cemented the difference between them. Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* highlights how easily this differentiation and subordination was accomplished:

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<sup>53</sup> Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2005), 7.

<sup>54</sup> Sue Mott, “Wimbledon: Triumph of American Values,” *The Telegraph*, July 8, 2000, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190102055448/https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/4776289/Wimbledon-Triumph-of-American-values.html> (accessed November 12, 2018).

<sup>55</sup> Fair, “Racism is to be Expected from Don Imus,” *Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting*, April 9, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190102203605/https://fair.org/take-action/action-alerts/racism-is-to-be-expected-from-don-imus/> (accessed November 12, 2018).

Along the river, three men, plastered with bright red earth from head to foot, strutted to and fro restlessly. When we came abreast again, they faced the river, stamped their feet, nodded their horned heads, swayed their scarlet bodies; they shook towards the fierce river-demon a bunch of black feathers, a mangy skin with a pendant tail—something that looked like a dried gourd; they shouted periodically together strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language; and the deep murmurs of the crowd, interrupted suddenly, were like the responses of some satanic litany.<sup>56</sup>

This passage's description paints the colonized men as a savage—and evil—component of the animalistic African jungle. One only needs to look as far as the employment of the word savage, or barbaric to see how strongly these dualistic conceptions were engrained in the thought systems of the colonizers. Building on the mind/body dualism, Enlightenment thinkers radically separated thinking 'man' from unthinking 'nature.' By distinguishing "European man's presumed capacity for mental reason from the supposedly animalistic nature-bound bodily impulses of women and the colonized, enlightenment thinkers created a powerful justification for colonial expansion and the exploitation of labor and environment."<sup>57</sup> The resulting sphere of inferiority was seen as less than human, lacking in rationality, morality, or culture.<sup>58</sup>

Race is a feminist issue. While not a traditionally ecofeminist theme, systemic racism, or the ways in which western systems perpetuate racism and discrimination, must be addressed. If a goal of feminism is to achieve equality for women, then looking at the obstacles facing the most disadvantaged women deserves substantial attention. Feminism as a field has a history of centering the experience of white women and claiming it as normative. Victories made by white

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<sup>56</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 175.

<sup>57</sup> Neel Ahuja, "Chapter 16: Colonialism," in *Gender: Matter*, ed. Stacy Alaimo, 237-251 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2017), 245.

<sup>58</sup> Plumwood, *Mastery of Nature*, 4.

women for white women do not automatically extend to women of color, especially those of a different socioeconomic class, or those without U.S. citizenship. The problems addressed by white feminism most often times do not affect those outside that realm of privilege. For example, the #MeToo movement has centered around exposing and eliminating sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace. However, exposing the problem has mostly happened in highly visible professions among highly affluent people, particularly those who are in the public eye. There are concerns that working-class women and women of color are being left behind by this movement, exemplified in the following sentiment: activist Charlene Carruthers asks, “If wealthy, highly visible women in news and entertainment are sexually harassed, assaulted and raped—what do we think is happening to women in retail, food service and domestic work?”<sup>59</sup> What do we think is happening to women with no visibility, who are alone in the fields, who have no record of existing in this country, and no ability to come forward?

Many feminist movements ignore the needs of non-white women. And many initiatives that work for justice for marginalized groups of people need to give more attention to the larger systems at work. For example, simply increasing minimum wage will not solve the exploitation of farmworkers. Even ensuring that farmworkers get paid a ‘fair price’ will not ensure fair treatment. Systemic racism is a powerful force that is perpetuated by seemingly innocent daily occurrences and interactions. Simply addressing one aspect such as wages or heat-safety will not address the reasons that the workers need heat-safety regulations in the first place.

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<sup>59</sup> Charlene Carruthers, Twitter post, @CharleneCac, November 29, 2017, 5:41am, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190102210253/https://twitter.com/CharleneCac?lang=en> (Accessed November 13, 2018).



### 2.6.2 Race and Religion

Though it is often not discussed, there are clear connections between Christianity and racism, or rather Christian supremacy and white supremacy. This influence is not just historical, it is still very active today. Jeannine Hill Fletcher chronicles the ways in which Christian people and Christian theologians have played a major role in the dispossession of Black, Indigenous, and people of color throughout the history of America, arguing that “Whiteness and Christian-ness have been twin pillars of the dominant religio-racial project.”<sup>60</sup> In colonial times, God’s providence was seen as justification for invading, conquering, and converting the newly discovered lands and peoples, and while there were debates as to the varying degrees of humanity of the people inhabiting these lands, there was a general consensus that Christianity was God’s plan for all people. Seeing Christianity as the ‘supreme’ religion is the sin of supremacy, and “the theology of Christian supremacy gave birth to the ideology of White supremacy.”<sup>61</sup>

The narratives and the theology put forward by white Christians in the US privileges whiteness and Christian-ness and has created the conditions of their superior position in terms of resources, housing, education, health, etc.<sup>62</sup> This racialized legislation continues to dispossess Black, Indigenous and people of color through social, political, and economic means. Fletcher calls on white Christians and white theologians to the task of acknowledging their role in creating conditions and narratives of dispossession, and also to making this dispossession seem reasonable or ordained by God,<sup>63</sup> concluding that white supremacy will not be able to be undone

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<sup>60</sup> Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy: Christianity, Racism, and Religious Diversity in America* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017), 3.

<sup>61</sup> Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy*, 5.

<sup>62</sup> Fletcher, 47.

<sup>63</sup> Fletcher, 1.

until feelings of Christian superiority are also eradicated. Fortunately, the situation created by white Christian supremacy is not what the gospel advocates for, and with work, the Christian community can overcome these problems.

Excluding farmworkers from legal protection, minimum wage, overtime pay, and the ability to organize is not by accident—it's by design and it is racially motivated. Marc Linder explores the reason farmworkers were left out of New Deal legislation as well as the Fair Labor Standards Act, and contends that it is because Roosevelt was forced to compromise with southern congressmen who were fighting to “preserve the social and racial plantation system in the South—a system resting on the subjugation of blacks and other minorities. As a result, New Deal legislation, including the FLSA, became infected with unconstitutional racial motivation.”<sup>64</sup>

The farming system in the United States today remains an example of continued racist policies. Building on the foundation laid out by Fletcher regarding the prioritization of whiteness and Christian-ness in legislation, it is vital that systemic racism in policy and legislation be recognized and called what it is: white supremacy. Currently, there is a tendency within the United States to believe that our nation has dealt with racism and has moved beyond it, but this is not the case. Few people want to admit that racism and white supremacy are still very much present, not only in existing laws, but in the mindset of the general population as well as the current administration. One need only look at the attitudes perpetuated by the forty-fifth president to understand how deep seated these attitudes are: the discussion surrounding the building of a border wall between the US and Mexico to keep out dangerous immigrants exemplifies this. When we spot racism, we need to call it what it is instead of framing it as an

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<sup>64</sup> Marc Linder, “Farm Workers and the Fair Labor Standards Act: Racial Discrimination in the New Deal” *Texas Law Review* 65 (1987): 1336.

economic issue or one of homeland security. A primary reason that farmworkers are mistreated is because of the prevailing attitude of white supremacy.

## **2.7 Disregard for the Earth**

The last theme of intersectional ecofeminism is respect for the earth. The degradation of the natural world gained significant momentum throughout the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As the industrial revolution took hold colonies were depleted of their raw goods to support the growth of manufacturing, and the mechanization of systems from textiles to agriculture represented a shift in consciousness from seeing nature as a living body to seeing it as a machine.

Ecofeminists recognize that the degradation of the environment is a result of pursuing unrestricted economic gain. Currently, within the framework of global capitalism and the rise of corporations, the Earth is no longer a machine but an abstraction. Heather Eaton critiques the view of global capitalism that one can “rise above context and place to thrive in a virtual globe of riches with little or no constraints...this ‘globe’ of which they speak is an utter abstraction with no accountability to anything but the hegemonic economic agenda.”<sup>65</sup> Eaton documents the leeching of the cyanide used to separate minerals from mines is into the water table in Latin America, and the deforestation of the rainforest in south America specifically Brazil, as significantly contributing to climate change. As discussed above, those who are most affected by climate change are shoe on the devalued side of the dualism: Indigenous people, women, the poor, the earth, women, children, bodies.

The earth is in need of care. Not only for its own sake, but for the sake of the women who are disproportionately affected by its degradation, for the sake of the laborers who work on the

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<sup>65</sup> Heather Eaton and Lois Ann Lorentzen, *Ecofeminism and Globalization: Exploring Culture, Context, and Religion* (Lanham: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 25.

land and are poisoned by being close to it. Looking forward to determining what a successful farmworker initiative consists of, care for the earth is a key requirement. Any effort must recognize that how we treat the earth directly affects how it impacts those who work intimately with it—especially women. Indeed, the farmworkers are on the front line of these consequences. A.E. King states it succinctly: “women in their role as ‘producers’ both socially and reproductively, are uniquely able to understand the costs of technologies which pillage the Earth’s natural riches”<sup>66</sup>

### ***2.7.1 Religion’s Role in Disregard for the Earth***

Christianity has played a major role in how our society, currently and historically, has understood the relationship between humans and the earth. The creation story in particular sets a tone of dominion. Returning to one of the examples from above, the piece of scripture from Genesis that grants man dominion over all the earth and those creatures who dwell upon it, has been seen as the source of man’s right to uninhibited mastery over nature. This mastery has turned into domination which has played out in ways that have resulted in destruction.

Additionally, Christianity as a faith, emphasizes the impermanence of his world, and instead prioritizes a looking forward to the better kingdom to come. As Ruether explains, this focus on salvation in the next world causes us to see our redemption as an escape from this material world. Because of this, there is a lack of accountability for the condition of this planet. This concept is exemplified in the popular bumper sticker: *notw* (not of this world) that many people identifying with the Christian faith place on their car. More often than not, I have noticed these stickers not on electric cars, but giant trucks with exhaust pipes driving in urban areas. It

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<sup>66</sup> Kings, “Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism,” 75.

sends the message loud and clear: ‘I am not of this world and as such, I take no responsibility for the condition in which I leave it.’

It is vital that churches recognize how this biblical message may come across, and take steps to avoid its members adopting this negligent mentality. Some steps that could help are the idea within liberation theology that God’s Kingdom begins here and now, and people of faith are called to bring it about. The promise of the kingdom can only be fulfilled by God, but there must be a constant struggle toward the kingdom: “the struggle for justice,” emphasizes Dom Antonio Fragoso, “is also the struggle for the kingdom of God.”<sup>67</sup> That is to say, humanity must participate in bringing the kingdom of God through liberation. The theology of liberation also implies the connection between human liberation—in the social and economic orders—and the kingdom of God,<sup>68</sup> further emphasizing Christians’ role in taking care not only of the earth but of its people.

Any initiative for farmworker justice must take into consideration care of the earth. As discussed above, disadvantaged populations are the first to experience the damaging effects of mistreatment of the earth and are also the ones who will feel those effects most severely. Disadvantaged populations who work intimately with the land are even more prone to be affected negatively by environmentally harmful actions. Naturally, any positive action on behalf of the earth will have positive effects on farmworkers because of their proximity to the land, and also on disadvantaged populations who include farmworkers, their families, and communities. Care for the earth ought to be a primary concern for farmworkers and those concerned with

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<sup>67</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, “History is One,” in *Gustavo Gutierrez: Essential Writings*, ed. James Nickoloff (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 90.

<sup>68</sup> Gutierrez, “Toward a Theology of Liberation,” in *Essential Writings*, 26.

farmworker justice, because not only are their fates tied to the earth, but so are the fates of all humans.

## CHAPTER 3:

### Triumphs and Failures of Farmworker Initiatives: Fair Trade

#### **3.1 Goals for this Chapter**

The goal of this chapter is to evaluate the first of two major initiatives for farmworker justice: fair trade (the second will be farmworker unions). The evaluation will be twofold, first addressing the fair trade movement in general, and second, evaluating the policies and practices of one fair trade organization in particular: Fair Trade USA.<sup>1</sup> I will first introduce the movement by providing some history and some definitions of fair trade. Then I will look at how Fair Trade USA defines fair trade and outline their specific accomplishments. Next, I will examine some popular critiques of the organization as well as the movement in general, and will then present my own critique drawing upon the intersectional ecofeminist themes presented Chapter 2. Finally, I will summarize the successes and failures of the movement and organization, and provide a final evaluation.

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<sup>1</sup> A quick note to attempt to prevent any confusion about the multiple forms and meanings of fair trade: “fair trade” as a stand-alone concept will be neither capitalized nor hyphenated and will refer to the fair trade movement in general. The phrase “fair-trade,” (hyphenated and lowercase) will be hyphenated when referring to a product that has been certified as fairly traded, for example fair-trade coffee or fair-trade products. “Fairtrade” (one word and capitalized) is a trademark and signals certification by the Fairtrade Labelling Organizations (FLO). Fair Trade Certified (two words, capitalized) refers specifically to items certified by Fair Trade USA, a separate organization from FLO. In its publications, Fair Trade USA capitalizes all uses of Fair Trade, even when referring to the movement in general (for example it refers to itself and the movement both as Fair Trade), which is somewhat misleading and inconsistent with common usage, but serves the purpose of their readers associating any mention of fair trade with their specific organization. I will adhere to the above guidelines except for in direct quotations. For more information, consult Adam Brett, “Chapter 8: Fairtrade, fair-trade, fair trade and ethical trade: reflections of a practitioner,” in *Fairtrade Impacts* (2017), <https://web.archive.org/web/20190212182906/https://www.developmentbookshelf.com/doi/full/10.3362/9781780449067.008>, (accessed Feb 11, 2019).

### **3.2 Scope of Evaluation**

The following evaluations of fair trade and farmworker unions is not meant to be an exhaustive evaluation, for that lies outside the scope of this chapter. Rather, the purpose is to critique the initiative from an intersectional ecofeminist perspective and determine the areas in which they have succeeded and the areas in which they have fallen short.

The criteria I will use to evaluate will be a combination of determining the extent to which their goals are in line with those of intersectional ecofeminism, and how effective they are at achieving those goals. In theory, since they are both initiatives aimed at farmworker justice, both their goals and actions should be in line with those of ecofeminism, since we saw in the previous chapter the close alignment of intersectional ecofeminism and the needs of farmworkers. The ecofeminist critique will focus on the four major critiques presented in Chapter 2: hierarchal and dualistic thinking, patriarchy and power, systemic racism, and disregard for the earth.

There are many different fair trade organizations. For the purposes of this paper I will examine the movement in general, but also some specific policies of an organization. The organization I have chosen is Fair Trade Certified USA (formerly part of Fairtrade), which is based in the USA. I selected this organization because it's the largest fair trade organization in the United States and also the most easily accessible for purchasers living in the U.S. However, there is substantial disagreement within the fair trade movement over some of their practices. Fair Trade USA does not represent the practices of all fair trade organizations, and while some aspects of it may be more heavily critiqued than the practices of others, much of the general critique of the movement will hold true for any fair trade company.



### **3.3 Fair Trade**

#### ***3.3.1 History***

The practice of trading goods fairly, in a way that takes into consideration the wellbeing of the person producing the product, was started in the 1950s by Christian organizations as a way to help refugees of World War II recover economically. The Church of the Brethren started Sales Exchange for Refugee Rehabilitation and Vocation (SERRV), and began exporting cuckoo clocks made by German refugees to be sold at their gift shop in the United States.<sup>2</sup> During the same time period, Oxfam UK started selling handmade crafts made by Chinese refugees in their secondhand shops in the United Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> Strengthened by the popular slogan “Trade not Aid” circulating in the 1960s, these shops began increasing their line of handmade goods as well as the countries of origin, and many similar shops sprang up globally, offering ‘fair’ compensation for the artisans. The multiple organizations and initiatives that were arising focused primarily on locally sourced handicrafts because of their connections with missionaries, but as the market for tribal baskets and needlework reached its peak, organizations turned to raw goods and single products for example coffee, tea, cacao, etc. This resulted in the need for organizations that could do two things: regulate and certify fairly traded commodities, and also label and market them in a way that would make them stand out and be able to compete with non fair-trade items at any retail location, not only fair trade markets.

In 1988 the first official fair trade certification label emerged, the Max Havelaar label. This label resulted from the call of Dutch missionary Franz Vanderhoff Boersma, a liberation

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<sup>2</sup> Eileen Davenport and William Low, “Fair Trade, Peace, and Development in Conflict Zones,” in *Handbook of Research on Fair Trade*, eds. Laura T. Reynolds and Elizabeth A. Bennett, 355-371 (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015), 360.

<sup>3</sup> Alex Nicholls and Charlotte Opal, *Fair Trade: Market-Driven Ethical Consumption* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Pub., 2005), 20.

theologian and priest who was living Mexico and leading the Union of Indigenous Communities in the Isthmus Region (UCIRI).<sup>4</sup> He called for a substantive as opposed to symbolic purchase of coffee, enough to have an impact on the UCIRI's peasant farmers.<sup>5</sup> The effort was successful, and the Max Havelaar certification allowed for the coffee to enter the mainstream market. In 1997, the Fairtrade Labeling Organization (FLO) was created to oversee the setting, certifying, and enforcing of Fairtrade standards. In 2002 the Fairtrade Mark was developed and three years later, Fairtrade certification included tea, cacao, wine, cotton, honey, some fruits, orange juice, cut flowers, and even some manufactured goods.<sup>6</sup> As of 2016, more than 1.6 farmers have been impacted, and global sales of reached €7.88 billion.<sup>7</sup> What began as a network of groups providing alternative trade has grown into an internationally organized network with one of the fastest growing markets catering to the ethical consumer.<sup>8</sup>

FLO is only one of the handful of global organizations that comprises the fair trade movement. There are other organizations that contribute to the movement in different ways. Fair for Life, for example, certifies entire companies based on their core principles, management, product sourcing, working conditions and other conditions.<sup>9</sup> The World Fair Trade Organization and Fair Trade Federation are umbrella membership organizations for fair trade companies.

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<sup>4</sup>Fair trade is closely associated with the liberation theology movements in Latin America: some of the original fair-trade coffee organizations were set up by prominent figures in the Catholic Church.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Jaffee, *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability, and Survival* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 12.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Lyon and Mark Moberg, eds., *Fair Trade and Social Justice: Global Ethnographies* (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 6.

<sup>7</sup> Fairtrade International, *Annual Report 2016-2017*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190102060144/https://annualreport16-17.fairtrade.net/en/> (Accessed September 4, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Gavin Fridell, *Fair Trade Coffee: The Prospects and Pitfalls of Market-Driven Social Justice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Fair for Life, "Certified Operator: Sambazon," (June 2, 2018) [https://web.archive.org/web/20190102060303/http://www.fairforlife.org/pmws/indexDOM.php?client\\_id=fairforlife&page\\_id=certified&lang\\_iso639=en&company\\_id=858](https://web.archive.org/web/20190102060303/http://www.fairforlife.org/pmws/indexDOM.php?client_id=fairforlife&page_id=certified&lang_iso639=en&company_id=858) (Accessed September 4, 2018).

Finally, there are certification organizations, which focus on developing standards, ensuring compliance, and labeling fair-trade products. In terms of products, a ‘fair-trade product’ can be almost anything, whereas a fair-trade *certified* product, certified by for example FLO or Fair Trade USA, must be a commodity that is grown, and can as a result be monitored and thus certified: for example, coffee, chocolate, fruits, rice, flowers, and cotton. A shirt cannot be certified because there is no system in place to monitor the entire supply chain.<sup>10</sup>

### ***3.3.2 Definitions and General Conceptions of Fair Trade***

To provide a single definition of fair trade is difficult because it is a general term and a wide-ranging concept that could refer to anything from a general idea of how to buy or sell products to specific regulations companies must follow. It could mean the concept of fairly traded goods, refer to the label, a mindset, or one of many organizations. By its supporters, fair trade is generally seen as “a means by which solidarity and mutual respect are created between producers and consumers in place of capitalist imperatives of competition and profit maximization.”<sup>11</sup> How that plays out for each company, however, varies greatly, as do their intentions. While some organizations seem to prioritize solidarity and mutual respect, others are more driven by profit and view fair trade as a marketing scheme to increase sales; still others see it as an opportunity to engage in more ethical business practices. As there are differences in interpretations of the movement, there is also much debate over who is doing it better, for example, whether fair trade organizations should be focused on increasing the availability of fair-

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<sup>10</sup> Fair Trade Winds, “Guide to Fair Trade Labels,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20190102060502/https://www.fairtradewinds.net/guide-fair-trade-labels/> (Accessed September 6, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Lyon and Moberg, *Fair Trade and Social Justice*, vii.

trade products by partnering with large corporations, or whether fair trade should limit its partnerships instead focusing on only small growers.

Sarah Lyon explains how fair trade typically works: fair-trade products are certified and labeled, showing their participation in a movement which prioritizes socially and environmentally sustainable forms of production. Fair-trade products have a substantially higher retail price, but the extra cost is intended to translate to higher earnings for family and small-scale farmers, sending the message that the company is invested in the best interest of small-scale producers as opposed to large-scale agribusiness.<sup>12</sup> However, as companies like Fair Trade USA are branching out to include larger corporations, this understanding is changing.

To complicate the issue, different organizations define fair trade differently as well. Fair Trade USA defines fair trade as “a global movement made up of a diverse network of producers, companies, shoppers, advocates, and organizations putting people and planet first.”<sup>13</sup> As an all-encompassing definition, this includes single producers, certification companies, as well as the consumers and advocates of this movement. However, its goal of putting people and planet first is vague. Fairtrade America defines fair trade as “a novel approach to international trade based on partnership, connecting the people who produce our food and goods with the people who purchase and enjoy them. We do this by certifying compliance with FIS that correct power imbalances and encourage business relationships based on trust and transparency.”<sup>14</sup> Still, fair trade farmers have a different view, seen in their responses when asked what fair trade was:

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<sup>12</sup> Lyon and Moberg, *Fair Trade and Social Justice*, 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> Fairtrade Certified, “What is Fairtrade,”

<https://web.archive.org/web/20190104175829/https://www.fairtradecertified.org/why-fair-trade> (Accessed September 4, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> Fair Trade America, “What Fairtrade Does,”

<https://web.archive.org/web/20190102060535/http://www.fairtradeamerica.org/What-is-Fairtrade/What-Fairtrade-does> (Accessed September 6, 2018).

*“I forget.” Yo olvido.*

Doane cites this response as the most frequent answer to the question of ‘what is fair trade’ among fair-trade coffee producers she interviewed in Mexico. She found that, “with the exception of a few cooperative leaders, coffee producers have little or no knowledge of the fair trade system or its purposes... They were not sure why it was ‘fair’ and viewed the fair trade market as ‘the market we have right now.’”<sup>15</sup>

The present goal is to look at the model and outcome of this movement in order to determine how well it benefits farmworkers and also examine some of its pitfalls. It may seem at first glance that fair trade is not directly relevant to farmworkers in California since many fair trade organizations source their products from developing countries and only sell them in more affluent western countries. However, fair trade is the world’s largest initiative dedicated to improving the lives and working conditions of farmworkers, so it would follow to see how well it has worked, and what lessons can be applied to farmworkers in the United States. Additionally, because of the concern about poor conditions and pay of farmworkers in the United States, Fair Trade USA has recently expanded to certify farms in the United States, acknowledging that “conditions for many agricultural workers are still far below Fair Trade USA’s standards.”<sup>16</sup> This inclusion is a major step in recognizing the existence of this formerly overlooked group of exploited laborers.

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<sup>15</sup> Molly Doane, “Relationship Coffees,” in *Fair Trade and Social Justice*, eds. Lyon and Moberg, 252.

<sup>16</sup> Nick Romero, “Not just for Foreign Foods: Fair-Trade Label Comes to U.S. Farms,” *NPR*, April 19, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190102060615/https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2017/04/19/524377647/not-just-for-foreign-foods-fair-trade-label-comes-to-u-s-farms> (Accessed September 6, 2018).

### **3.4 Fair Trade USA: Logistics of Operation**

#### ***3.4.1 Fair Trade's Mission***

The mission of Fair Trade USA is to “enable sustainable development and community empowerment by cultivating a more equitable global trade model that benefits farmers, workers, fisherman, consumers, industry, and the earth. We achieve our mission by certifying and promoting Fair Trade products.”<sup>17</sup> Their vision is to empower family farmers and agricultural workers around the world, and also to enrich the lives of those living in poverty.<sup>18</sup> While many organizations share this vision, some go about it through aid or charity. Fair trade movements take a different approach. Rather than creating dependency on aid, they use a market-based approach. Fair Trade USA explains how this approach “empowers farmers to get a fair price for their harvest, helps workers create safe working conditions, provides a decent living wage and guarantees the right to organize.”<sup>19</sup> Other parts of Fair Trade USA’s vision are enabling farmers to eat better, keep their children in school, make “Fair Trade” a lifestyle in which there are products available in every category, and to increase choice to the world’s consumers. Finally, “Fair Trade” has a vision for its business, to secure profitability and competitiveness, secure long-term partnerships in its supply chain, and to obtain the highest quality products.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Fair Trade, “Who We Are,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20190102060646/https://www.fairtradecertified.org/who-we-are> (Accessed September 7, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> Fair Trade USA, “Quality Manual: Version 1.0.0,” (May 2, 2017), [https://www.fairtradecertified.org/sites/default/files/filemanager/documents/FTUSA\\_MAN\\_QualityManual\\_EN\\_1.0.0.pdf](https://www.fairtradecertified.org/sites/default/files/filemanager/documents/FTUSA_MAN_QualityManual_EN_1.0.0.pdf) (Accessed September 6, 2018).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

### **3.4.2 Accomplishments & Focuses**

The Fair Trade USA certification is the primary means through which Fair Trade USA accomplishes its four primary goals of income sustainability, empowerment, individual and community well-being, and environmental stewardship. In terms of income sustainability, the organization says that wages should be able to fulfill a household's essential needs despite fluctuations in market prices.<sup>21</sup> Empowerment means that workers will have a voice in the workplace and community. Community well-being consists of people having the ability to invest in the future through committees who decide how to allocate the "Fair Trade Premium" based on their community's needs, such as clean water, education, or health care. Finally, environmental stewardship means that their fair trade standards will help keep the planet healthy by prohibiting harmful chemicals from entering ecosystems and by protecting natural resources.

The primary means for achieving these goals is Fair Trade USA Certification and their extensive regulations which govern price, production, and business development. These regulations vary depending on the organization involved, but generally center around five major themes: the minimum fair trade price and how the organizations use their premium, workers' rights, working conditions and wages, environmental sustainability, and transparency.<sup>22</sup> As a result of these regulations, Fair Trade USA advertises that it has "empowered more than 900,000 farmers and workers in more than 45 countries." Also, since 1998, producers "have earned a total financial benefit of \$551 million through sales of Fair Trade Certified products, including nearly \$380 million in Community Development funds."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Fair Trade, "Why Fair Trade," <https://web.archive.org/web/20190104201845/https://www.fairtradecertified.org/why-fair-trade> (Accessed September 7, 2018).

<sup>22</sup> Fair Trade USA, *Agricultural Production Standards (APS) At a Glance* (June 2017), 6-10, [https://www.fairtradecertified.org/sites/default/files/filemanager/documents/APS/FTUSA\\_GUI\\_APSTOverviewWebLong\\_EN\\_1.0.0.pdf](https://www.fairtradecertified.org/sites/default/files/filemanager/documents/APS/FTUSA_GUI_APSTOverviewWebLong_EN_1.0.0.pdf) (Accessed September 7, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> Fair Trade, "Why Fair Trade."

### **3.5 Critiques**

Despite the seeming success of fair trade exemplified in the impressive numbers and numerous visions cited above, there are critiques leveled from many different angles. Some critiques focus on the efficacy of specific organizations while others question the model in general. I will first outline a couple popular critiques of the fair trade movement followed by an intersectional ecofeminist critique.

#### ***3.5.1 Popular Critiques***

While the goals of the fair trade movement seem honorable, there are several prominent concerns centering on its efficacy and debates about the best way to go about its mission. In terms of efficacy, is fair trade making a difference? A major question that farmers often bring up is whether or not it is worth it to pursue fair trade certification. The barriers to entry are high and the payoff is not always present. Sununtar Setboonsarng addresses this in his study on the impact of fair trade. After an analysis of the financial benefits of fair trade certification on smallholders, he writes, “while both organic and fair trade certification have significant poverty reduction *potential* [italics mine], so far their large-scale impacts on poverty have yet to be realized. This is due to the high costs associated with certification.”<sup>24</sup> An additional problem is that the supply of fair-trade products repeatedly outpaces demand, and as a result, though many farmers sought certification as a way to overcome the low international prices (of for example, coffee, sugar, or tea), not all of their product receives a premium. Mendez estimates that based their research, only

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<sup>24</sup> Sununtar Setboonsarng, “Can Ethical Trade Certification Contribute to the Attainment of the Millennium Development Goals? A Review of Organic and Fair-trade Certification,” *ADBI*, Discussion Paper 115, Asian Development Bank Institute (August 2008), 16.



20-25% of their fair-trade certified coffee receives a premium.<sup>25</sup> A final reason many farmers believe that pursuing fair trade certification is not worth it is because the extra work required is not reflected in the price they receive. This is evident in the large fluctuation of certified members in relation to the changing prices of products: when prices for produce are high, farmers turn to coyotes (middle-men who pay for products up front) who will give identical or higher prices. However, when the price of crops drops, fair trade membership increases.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, a central debate within the fair trade movement is how to best carry out the mission, specifically, whether it is better to target co-ops and smallholder farms in order to build relationships with individual farmers, or whether the focus should be on corporations who employ a larger volume of workers. The question is one of quality versus quantity. The issue of how to best serve the purpose of fair trade has gained attention in the past decade as some companies have sought to increase their sales by signing contracts with larger corporations instead of the traditional smaller producer. Given the importance of building personal relationships with farmers in many fair-trade companies, this shift has been a contentious one.

In 2011, Fair Trade USA left Fairtrade International because of differences in these priorities. Fair Trade USA's CEO Paul Rice explains their motivation: "Fair Trade USA has boldly questioned the status quo and is moving in a new direction to significantly increase the effectiveness and reach of the Fair Trade model."<sup>27</sup> They expected to double their impact within three years. The group recognized that Fairtrade International and their certifying body FLO was

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<sup>25</sup> V. Ernesto Mendez, et al., "Effects of Fair Trade and Organic Certification on Small-scale Coffee Farmer Households in Central America and Mexico," *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems* 25, no. 3 (September 2010), 238.

<sup>26</sup> Jaffee, 89.

<sup>27</sup> Carmen Night, et al., "Equal Exchange: On a Mission to End Poverty Through Economic Empowerment," *Equal Exchange*, case study, 1  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20190105225213/https://pasnaklapchick.files.wordpress.com/2018/08/equal-exchange-case-study-2017.pdf> (Accessed September 8, 2018).

focused on small farmers organized into cooperatives, and split from them so that all companies could become certified, both large and small, ultimately having a “more inclusive model” that they advertised would allow them to reach over 4 million farm workers. This model included the certifying of plantations, a sensitive subject for many organizations who had avoided working with large agribusinesses. Critics of this new direction argue that the Fair Trade USA’s new certification standards are easier to get, lowering standards and thus lowering the impact in local communities. Many other fair trade organizations such as Equal Exchange and the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Small Fair Trade Producers (CLAC) have issued statements condemning this change.<sup>28 29</sup> Their primary concern is that the fair trade movement has sacrificed its principles, and the bottom line has become the priority rather than the relationships with the farmers who the movement was meant to help.

### ***3.5.2 Intersectional Ecofeminist Critique of Fair Trade***

From an ecofeminist perspective, the critique can be divided into four categories, corresponding to the four themes from Chapter 2. The first critique is that fair trade is built on a hierarchal, dualistic model that separates the north and south hemispheres, affirming the superior position of the north, and the inferior position of the south. This is the primary and most pertinent critique of fair trade, and as such, the majority of the ecofeminist critique will focus on this theme. The three secondary critiques are: 2) fair trade encourages and is dependent on

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<sup>28</sup> Merling Preza Ramos, statement from the Board President about Fair Trade USA, Latin American and Caribbean Network of Small Fair Trade Producers (CLAC) September 22, 2011 <https://web.archive.org/web/20190106165819/http://clac-comerciojusto.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2011-CLAC-Statement-on-FT-USA-english.pdf> (Accessed September 15, 2018).

<sup>29</sup> Hugo Reyes Alvarado, President of the Directive Council of Mexican Coordinator of Small Fair Trade Producers, A.C. “Public Pronouncement on The situation created by Fairtrade USA separating from FLO” December 2, 2011 <https://web.archive.org/web/20190106171648/https://smallfarmersbigchange.coop/2011/12/15/mexican-small-farmer-fair-trade-producers-speak-out-we-can-only-move-forward-with-authentic-fair-trade/> (Accessed September 15, 2018).

consumer capitalism which maintains the patriarchal power system that oppresses (and ensures the continued oppression of) specific populations in order to provide for wealthy western consumers; 3) fair trade perpetuates and is dependent on the notion of the white savior; 4) fair trade, though it states its commitment to sustainable farming practices, only takes minor steps to mitigate its negative environmental impact and remains entrenched in practices that continue to neglect the earth.

### *3.5.2.a Critique of Dualistic thinking in Fair Trade*

If the primary goal of ecofeminists is to break down hierarchal and dualistic value systems, then fair trade is in direct opposition to ecofeminism. Their entire model is built upon and depends on the continuation of dualistic hierarchal thinking. Fair trade requires two groups of people: those who are in need, and those who have excess; and it ensures that these two groups will remain in existence.

The first, and typically the most prominent dualistic relationship in fair trade is the dichotomy between the consumer and the producer in which the producers are clearly the subordinated faction. The consumer is an individual in the Global North with excess income, and the producer is typically a farmer or farmworker in a developing country in the Global South whose livelihood depends on a charitable act of someone on the other side of the world. Instead of a denied dependency in this dualistic relationship as Plumwood discusses, in this context there is an overt and even encouraged dependency of the producers on not only the charitable feeling of the consumer, but also the existence of fair trade programs, and on the existence of cultural capitalism which prioritizes ethically made products as a desirable niche market. This dualism is further problematic in that the role of the consumer is seen as the valuable and more important

component because the consumer enables the producer to ‘benefit,’ yet the true benefit goes to the consumer who gets what is advertised as a superior product that helps the poor, the earth, and ultimately allows them to feel good about the morally superior purchase they have made.

The second problematic dualism relates to dividing the world into north/south hemispheres. Looking at the producer/consumer dualism a little deeper, the roles are divided along hemispherical lines: those in the Global South are the producers and those in the Global North the consumers. Fair trade consumers are mostly located in affluent countries in Western Europe and North America while producers are generally located in the Central and South America, the South Pacific, Africa, and some parts of Asia. This dichotomy reinforces the division established during the colonial period between empires and their colonies. From the 15<sup>th</sup> through the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the colonized territories were used as a means of production of raw goods to help the developing economy of Western Europe. Now they are used to help developing egos. The hyperseparation that developed is reinforced through fair trade because it maintains the status quo. Moreover, this improved status quo is seen as a success: workers in former colonies are getting paid 2% more to produce goods for the Global North, and now consumers in the north can move forward with a clear conscience. The people of former colonies, whether they live in their native land or not are still hyperseparated, still radically excluded, still associated with the land. It’s the same pattern, just a reformulation of perception. The south’s connection with the land is reaffirmed, as is their utilitarian role. Furthermore, dividing producers/consumers along hemispherical lines creates the assumption that all people in developing countries are poor workers or farmers, ignoring the fact that there are many wealthy individuals with purchasing

power in these countries. It also does not acknowledge the diaspora of farmworkers in the north that live in poverty, working land that isn't their own.<sup>30</sup>

The replication of colonial hierarchies is further seen in the mind/body dualisms as well. Historically, the prevailing systems of thought came from elites in North America and Western Europe, while physical labor especially land-related labor, was provided by people from the Global South. Through fair trade, this dynamic is perpetuated: the north remains self-appointedly responsible for the intellectual task of solving the world's problems, and the south remains entrenched with the bodily responsibilities of carrying out those tasks. The concept of fair trade and the philosophies behind it came out of a western worldview, and so while the fair trade organizations and board of directors provides the 'vision' and lays out intellectually how it will work, it assumes the people of the countries they partner with will simply provide the physical labor to make their business profitable. The regulations, certification, sustainability requirements, and methods of growing are all devised by the north: it is the same pattern of the hierarchy of rulers over workers. Again, the north sets the rules and is in control—even to the point of setting the minimum price and fair-trade premium—while the south's participation is limited, and its auxiliary role is reaffirmed.

Despite these criticisms, advocates of fair trade would respond that fair trade does not reinforce subordination of the devalued groups because it functions to strengthen the power and abilities of traditionally marginalized people. Fair trade has the potential to give small farms and their farmworkers a voice in the global market and give them the knowledge to understand and in some cases set their own produce prices. It has the potential to empower small farms by

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<sup>30</sup> Only recently, in 2017, was the first fair trade certification extended to farms in the United States. Until that point it was assumed pay and working conditions for farmworkers in the United States were good enough not to warrant fair-trade certification.

allowing them to get out of debt and to invest in technology and knowledge that could increase their profits. Finally advocates of fair trade would respond that instead of reinforcing these hierarchal power structures, fair trade actually destabilizes and begins to reverse the power structure: giving more knowledge and control to the farmer gives them greater power. Fair trade does indeed have the potential for the above successes, however, the more radical ecofeminist would respond that if the power given to the small Latin American farm is given, not on their terms but on the terms of the benefactor, then this is not power at all, but in fact further evidence of subordination.

### *3.6.2.b Critique of Patriarchal Power Systems in Fair Trade*

The second intersectional ecofeminist critique of fair trade is that it reinforces patriarchal power systems, predominantly capitalism. As discussed in Chapter 2, the emergence of colonization and the growth of capitalism along with it, played a major role in forming today's exploitative food system. Fair trade publicizes itself as something people can 'buy into' to help combat exploitative practices in the food system, when in fact it is the food system itself that is the problem; by purchasing fair-trade items, people are not only strengthening the system from which these exploitations come, but also are being led to believe that their purchase will be enough to solve the problem. This makes fair trade not only ineffective but dangerous.

Fair trade is rooted in an idea of justice that comes from the same school of thought that produced colonization and corporate capitalism, two of the most devastating ideologies to come to countries outside the West. Participating organizations and farms have played no role in developing or shaping the dominating capitalist consumer culture, nor the fair trade model of support. Historically, ideas from the north of how to help the developing world have been

unsuccessful at best. More often than not, they have served to keep many people in oppression. From missionary attempts to convert indigenous peoples to monoculture and cash cropping, ‘development’ ideas from the north have resulted in the loss of indigenous faiths and practices, loss of subsistence farming knowledge, and the loss of millions of lives. Fair trade as a concept of justice is not only ironic, it’s insulting.

As discussed earlier, modern capitalism represents the “most sophisticated and exploitative of all patriarchal, anthropocentric systems.”<sup>31</sup> Fair trade could be said to be this capitalist system but disguised as a morally upright cause. However, the underlying message is that social justice can be purchased: that people in privileged countries can buy their way out of complicity. This concept, which fair trade helps promote, is perhaps the most dangerous because it prevents the true problem from being unearthed. Fair trade is capitalizing on people’s good intentions and good will, yet at the same time solidifying the success of large corporations and ensuring the continued subordinated status of farmers throughout the world.

In the words of political philosopher Slavoj Zizek, “we are not discarding the evil; we are making the evil work for the good.”<sup>32</sup> This is not a solution; it is just patriarchal capitalism in disguise, or rather, what Zizek calls ‘cultural capitalism.’ In a scathing description of Starbucks, he describes how, in buying a cup of fair-trade coffee, “you don’t just buy a coffee, in the very consumerist act you buy your redemption from being only a consumerist.” Breaking it down, he explains how “it is immoral to use private property in order to alleviate the horrible evils that result from the institution of private property...this kind of trade with the rich is not the

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<sup>31</sup> Hathaway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 74.

<sup>32</sup> Slavoj Zizek, “The Ethical Implications of Charitable Capitalism,” transcript of RSA Animate, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190105231547/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpAMbpQ8J7g> (Accessed August 28, 2018).

solution.”<sup>33</sup> Achieving fair trade’s goals would mean the dissolution of fair trade: if workers were empowered and successful enough to trade on their own, there would be no need for fair trade, but that is not the goal of the organizations. Fair trade companies rely on continued poverty to keep themselves in business.

Fair trade advocates would deny relevance to claims that problematize fair trade’s use of capitalism in addressing injustice. Fair trade, particularly specific fair trade organizations were not meant to be all-encompassing solutions to the problems resulting from the current economic system; rather, organizations such as Equal Exchange Coffee and Fair for Life were founded to help a specific group experiencing a specific set of problems: small farmers experiencing poverty and a lack of access to better trading conditions. In addition, some (but not all) advocates of fair trade would not see a problem with utilizing the current economic system to enhance more ethical trading conditions. It is a powerful global system and thus has the potential to have a large positive effect. To accuse fair trade of failing to entirely reinvent the economy, rather than use it for its stated mission, is a rather unfair accusation. The more practical ecofeminist could agree with the above sentiment, however, a problem arises when fair trade is understood as *the solution* as opposed to a flawed attempt to do better. Some ecofeminists could concede that fair trade may be part of the solution and may function as a temporary step towards a better situation as opposed to a permanent suggestion for how trade should be structured or model for foundational change.

### 3.5.2.c Critique of Structural Racism in Fair Trade

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<sup>33</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (New York: Verso, 2009), 35.



The third intersectional ecofeminist critique of fair trade is in regard to racism, specifically encouraging the white savior complex. White savior complex is when white people ‘rescue’ people of color in a way that assumes superiority and therefore authority to intervene in another’s life in a self-serving manner. The help or charity is often more beneficial to the white person’s psyche and self-image, either personally or publicly. Power dynamics play an important role in white savior complex, as the white person assumes a position of power and exerts that power to ‘help.’ This power may be financial (monetary donation), intellectual (prescribing a correct course of action based on white knowledge), cultural (condemning a practice as unethical or incorrect), or political. Finally, white savior complex does not take into consideration the complex historical and other dynamics at work when prescribing a solution. Teju Cole coined the term ‘white savior industrial complex,’ and described it through a series of tweets, some of which are listed below.

- “The white savior supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening.”
- “The world exists simply to satisfy the needs, including importantly the sentimental needs of white people”
- “White savior industrial complex is not about justice; it’s about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege.”
- “American sentimentality is deadly.”<sup>34</sup>

Fair trade furthers the prevalence of white savior complex by strengthening the narrative that people of color need saving, and that white people are the ones that should (and can) come to the

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<sup>34</sup> Teju Cole, “The White-Savior Industrial Complex,” *The Atlantic*: March 21, 2012. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190114205605/https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/> (Accessed January 5, 2019).

rescue. The fair trade model for helping farmworkers is based on the premise that middle class white people can save people of color through spending money on things they were already going to buy. Using their financial privilege and spending a few cents more will provide them with their charitable act for the week accompanied by some warm fuzzies for doing something good.

This is problematic for a few reasons. First, it suggests that spending a few cents more is an adequate and appropriate way to be involved in social justice. Second, it implies that only people with financial privilege can participate in farmworker justice, and that predominantly white countries should come to the rescue of the other countries who need to be saved. Third, it strengthens the hierarchal dualisms along the lines of color and class, further reinforcing women (the majority of fair trade farmers) and people of color (also the majority of fair trade farmers) to be associated with those who need saving.

This narrative is reinforced even through the photographs on the Fair Trade USA website: the website is bursting with photos of people of color, mostly women, all situated in fields. All representations of the producers on their website are people of color, while almost all photos of consumers are white, with the exception of two Black women in fair-trade sports bras:

The bodies of women of color are hypervisible while remaining invisible—seen but not known. Obligatory images of them pressed against smizing, khaki-clad white women are a staple of these online shops...the women of color look so uncomfortable, so infantilized... When objectifying and speaking over the people one is claiming to help is an integral part of a business's narrative and optics, it isn't enough to call it patronizing—its dehumanizing.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Bani Amor, "Spend and Save: The Narrative of Fair Trade and White Saviorism," *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture: Money* 71 (Summer 2016).

Fair trade's encouragement of white saviorism also perpetuates the colonial mindset that developing countries exist to serve western nations: they serve through their existence as a supplier of raw goods and as a landscape to live out one's social justice impulses. Seeing how the white savior complex is present in fair trade demonstrates how people of color still are used as a means for white people to exercise their power. Fair trade alleviates white guilt so that no further action is needed, and for many, making the purchase is less about justice and more about having the experience of doing good, as Cole refers to in his tweets.

The problem is not simply white people's use of the Other to satisfy their need to feel philanthropic, but rather that this type of saviorism encourages a mindset of supremacy. "Saviorism employs a time-honored colonial narrative: the sad state of the savage Other necessitates civilizing via white/Western intervention, which maintains dominion over resources that sometimes trickle down to the needy via acts of charity...It validates supremacy more than anything, because assuming the role of the savior is also a show of power.<sup>36</sup> It is this power over the Other that is at the core of the critique of fair trade.

Advocates of fair trade may acknowledge that in some cases the white savior complex is present and problematic in fair trade. However, they would say that it is not common to all fair trade organizations or relationships, and that fair trade can exist without it being a result of white saviorism. Some would also argue that even if it is present, it does not matter because the end result is that farmers are in a better financial position. In response to these two retorts, white savior complex is not inherent to fair trade. In theory, any person could propose an agreement that commodities be fairly-traded—it need not come from a self-serving attempt at charity.

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<sup>36</sup> Amor, "Spend and Save."

However, the reality of how fair trade is acted out does have, more often than not, an element of white saviorism. It is up to the individual making a fair trade agreement or purchase to critically reflect on their true reasons for engaging.

#### *3.5.2.d Critique of Environmental Neglect in Fair Trade*

The final intersectional ecofeminist critique of fair trade is from an environmental perspective. While fair trade may seem to be ecologically minded given its guidelines on what pesticides are permissible and what agricultural practices are acceptable, practicing care for the earth and buying fair-trade products can be contradictory. The chief concern here is the distance between producing and consuming countries, necessitating long transportation times to move products from the south to the north. If the premise of fair trade is making goods that were grown or produced in the global south available to people in the global north, then international shipping, and the pollution that comes along with it, is necessary. A complex issue at best, it is almost impossible to evaluate the full impact of one item and say it in total causes less pollution than another. A study of the effect of fair trade's transportation needs on the environment by Cranefield University calculated that "producing roses in Kenya and exporting them by airplane to the United Kingdom is five times less harmful to the environment than growing them in heated greenhouses in the Netherlands."<sup>37</sup> However, this doesn't take into consideration all factors including pesticides, pollution of natural resources, etc., nor does it question the notion of sending flowers thousands of miles via air in the midst of environmental crisis. For some products that require a tropical environment, looking past the environmental cost of

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<sup>37</sup> Olivier Bailly, "Fair Trade, Sustainable Trade? Fair Trade and the Environment," *BTC: Belgian Development Agency for Trade for Development* (August 2010): 7.  
[https://web.archive.org/web/20190106173816/https://sellocomerciojusto.org/mm/file/Fair\\_trade\\_-\\_Sustainable\\_trade\\_\\_Nov2010.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20190106173816/https://sellocomerciojusto.org/mm/file/Fair_trade_-_Sustainable_trade__Nov2010.pdf) (Accessed November 1, 2018).

transportation may be slightly more acceptable, but for products like cotton which are grown throughout the United States, it may be harder to justify shipping a shirt from Mali to Los Angeles, even if it is fair trade.

In evaluating the environmental impact of transportation, air transport is the worst, followed by trucks, and then ships. Some fair trade companies take precautions to ensure their products contribute as little as possible to pollution. ECOCERT, for example, discourages the use of air freight, requiring instead that operators “study all realistic road and maritime alternatives.”<sup>38</sup> Fair for Life, another fair trade organization concerned about fuel consumption has committed to goals to reduce its consumption over the next three years. Regardless of the transportation, however, any amount will contribute to the damage to the environment. Cranefield University’s study concluded with a call for consumers to prioritize local products.

Ironically, the transportation required by consumers in wealthy nations to import these fair-trade goods *is* having an impact on climate change and will inevitably affect first and most severely the farmers who they’re trying to help. It is imperative that fair-trade oriented organizations recognize this risk and do everything they can to mitigate it. What is preferable, is for individuals in wealthy western nations to consider their need for consumption in the first place as a cause of global disintegration.

In addition to the regulations discussed above that fair trade organizations impose to limit their environmental impact, new technologies and careful planning can significantly contribute to fair trade becoming a more sustainable form of trade. In addition, the expansion of the Fair Trade Certified label to farms in the United States (and future plans for other developed countries) will

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<sup>38</sup> Olivier Bailly, “Fair Trade, Sustainable Trade? Fair Trade and the Environment,” *BTC*, 13.

significantly cut down on shipping distances will thus further decrease their environmental impact.

### **3.6 Final Evaluation: Successes & Failures**

Without a doubt, the fair trade movement has had an enormous positive impact on many people and communities throughout the world. This critique is not meant to detract from the positive effects it has had on people but rather express how some of the foundations of the movement it are flawed. In terms of major successes, fair trade has provided livelihoods for thousands of farmers globally. Gerardo Arias Camacho is one such farmer.

*“In the 1980s, the price of coffee fell so low that it didn’t cover the cost of production. Many farmers abandoned their land and went to the cities to find work. The coffee market was so unstable. We did not have a local school, good roads or bridges. Now that our consortium is Fairtrade-certified, prices are stable and we receive a guaranteed premium. We spend the money on education, environmental protection, roads and bridges, and improving the old processing plant. We have sponsored a scholarship program so that our kids can stay in school...My oldest son is in college, my ten-year old already had as much education as me, and my little princess is in her second year at school. With the help of Fairtrade, they might all be able to go to university. They won’t have to jump the border from Mexico to America, leaving their country for ten years, like me...As a Fairtrade farmer, I finally feel competitive—I feel that I have a tool in my hand. It has given me knowledge so that I am more able to defend myself and my people.”<sup>39</sup>*

-Gerardo Arias Camacho is a coffee farmer in Costa Rica and a member of the Fairtrade Int. consortium COOCAFE

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<sup>39</sup> Rachel Dixon, “Teach Us How To Fish—Do Not Just Give Us The Fish,” *The Guardian* (March 12, 2008), <https://web.archive.org/web/20190109023337/https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2008/mar/12/ethicalliving.lifeandhealth> (Accessed January 2, 2019).

Fair trade has undoubtedly been successful in providing an improvement in the pay and working conditions of many farmworkers in the global south. It has also been immensely successful in bringing attention and awareness to the issues of worker conditions and pay among the general public. Studies estimate that knowledge of the fair-trade label is at 58%, and those who have knowingly purchased a fair-trade product just over 25%.<sup>40</sup> The large scale knowledge of these issues, and the large scale willingness to pay more for a product produced without (or with less) abuses speaks to the power of marketing.

There are definite benefits to fair trade systems, however, it is not a clear solution to poverty. Regulations are fluid, not consistently enforced, and even in the best scenario, they guarantee a certain price (unless there is a surplus that outpaces demand), but that does not necessarily imply that the price is fair, that achieving certification is realistic for farmers, nor does it imply that certification will have a positive impact on the quality of life of the farmer or the community. The goals of an ecofeminist ethic entail more than simply a higher income and improved quality of life: they include freedom from oppression, empowerment, liberation, and it is not clear that fair trade has or is able to achieve this.

A major failure of fair trade is sending the message that making a purchase of a fair-trade product is *enough*, that it absolves the buyer from any complicity in the global system that resulted in the unfair situation in the first place. Fair trade's greatest failure lies in the structure itself. A movement based on reinforcing hierarchies will never be able to result in them being overcome.

Resources are still flowing from developing nations to western ones, but instead of gold to sustain the West's growing economies, now it's fair-trade coffee beans, bananas, or cotton to

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<sup>40</sup> Jason E. Taylor and Vigdis Boasson, "Who Buys Fair Trade and Why (or Why Not)?" *The Journal of Consumer Affairs* 2, no. 48 (June 1, 2014): 418.

sustain the product line of food corporations. Without a doubt, there are many areas in which fair trade benefits local economies with the 2% fair-trade premium, but compared to the 20% more consumers are willing to pay, the benefit to western food corporations is incomparable.



## CHAPTER 4:

### Triumphs and Failures of Farmworker Initiatives: United Farm Workers

#### **4.1 United Farm Workers**

The United Farm Workers is one of the most widely recognized worker rights initiatives in the United States and is regarded as the most successful. Because of its wide-reaching successes with the grape boycott, it is heralded as the leader in worker rights programs.

However, since its inception in the mid 1960s, much has changed, and some argue that it is not living up to its original goals. These shortcomings will be discussed in this chapter. However, its foundation was faith-based activism by and for farmworkers, and in that respect, its path, consisting of both successes and failures provides valuable insight for the current project.

##### ***4.1.1 History***

United Farm Workers is a labor union for farmworker union based in California. It was started by Cesar Chavez in the 1960s and is currently one of the largest unions advocating for farmworker rights in the United States. The history of the United Farm Workers is intertwined with the life of Cesar Chavez. Chavez began his activist career working for the Community Service Organization (CSO) for Latino civil rights and starting new chapters throughout northern California with the goal of getting Mexican-born residents to become American citizens and vote.<sup>1</sup> After gaining valuable experience in organizing and canvassing, Chavez and his wife Helen returned to Oxnard, CA in 1958 where he had once worked as a farmworker to start a new

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval, *Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1998), 49.

and unique CSO chapter. The goal was to encourage the workers in a lemon packing house to join a worker's union, to teach them their rights, embolden them, and do some good for the Chicano community in the area.<sup>2</sup> Cesar jumped head first into organizing, putting much of his effort on fighting for the right to work for local farmers in the area who had been replaced by braceros. "The jobs belonged to local workers...braceros didn't make any money, and they were exploited viciously, forced to work under conditions the local people wouldn't tolerate." Along with the CSO they formed an employment committee and after a year succeeded in making growers hire local unemployed workers and also increasing the wages from sixty-five to ninety cents an hour.<sup>3</sup>

Chavez was promoted to executive director of the CSO, but only held the position for three years. In 1962 he left the CSO in Los Angeles to devote himself full-time to a dream rooted in his migrant childhood and his rewarding experiences as a political activist—"the creation of an independent farmworkers union that would force growers to sit at a bargaining table face-to-face with the people who helped make them rich."<sup>4</sup> Basing himself in the center of agriculture, the San Joaquin Valley, Chavez began to find out what the farmworkers' most bitter complaints were. Most were about labor contractors. In secret house meetings, they "freely vented their loathing for the contractors, who bussed them to fields for a price, took a slice of their wages, and often charged them for water to drink. Some contractors even demanded bribes or sex from women looking for work."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, farmworker pay and conditions were abysmal, and had been officially recognized in a report by the state of California which noted that 25% had no

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<sup>2</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, *Fights in the Fields*, 53.

<sup>3</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, *Fights in the Fields*, 60.

<sup>4</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, *Fights in the Fields*, 62.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

place to refrigerate food or flush toilets, and less than 50% had running water in their house.<sup>6</sup>

Chavez made a plan to distribute thousands of registration cards that had simple questions on them like, how much do you think you should be paid, with the goal of learning more about the population and establishing a strong base of members.

Chavez also drew support from religious groups in the area including many Catholic churches and the California Migrant Ministry, an interdenominational church. Chavez became close with their ministry, accompanied pastors on weekend retreats and slowly grew a base and chief *campaneros* within the church. Chavez worked tirelessly, drawing on his experience organizing for the CSO and building momentum by personally driving all over the region handing out registration cards and eventually bringing the members together in meetings to voice their grievances. This was the beginning of the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), which would eventually be called the UFW.

#### ***4.1.2 Delano Grape Strike and Boycott***

In 1965, Filipino workers were protesting working conditions at table grape vineyards, and the movement was growing. Chavez held a meeting to discuss the issue which gathered more than 1200 supporters at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, and the workers decided to join the strike.<sup>7</sup> Chavez traveled to churches and university campuses to speak about the strike, asking for donations of food, money, and clothing. Using publicly visible techniques such as pilgrimages, picketing, and striking, Chavez sought support from everyone and anyone he could find. He also

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Randy Shaw, *Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, the UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 18.

asked them to come join farmworkers in *la causa*.<sup>8</sup> Students and clergy people came from all over the state to see what was going on and Chavez' efforts gained momentum.

To increase the effectiveness of their strike, the NFWA knew they had to have consumers on their side. Their strategy was to send out farmworkers and activists to forty strategic cities across the U.S. and Canada. Additionally, three picketers were sent to follow a grape shipment to the end destination at the Oakland docks, and began to try to convince the longshoremen to not load the shipment of grapes. They were successful, and 1000 ten-ton cases of grapes spoiled on the docks. As a result, a boycott became the primary means to fight against the growers.<sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup> The NFWA called on all of North America to boycott grapes that were not grown by growers in contract with them.

The role of churches and prayer groups proved to be invaluable during the strike, as it was an ingenious organizing technique. It also was an effective method of spreading the movement from farmworkers to buyers which played a major role in the strength and breadth of the boycott. Prayer groups and church meetings were effective in spreading the message, but widespread and even national religious publications in support of the boycott were instrumental in making the Delano strike and boycott a national issue.<sup>11</sup> In Canada, the United Churches of Canada publicly declared support for the boycott bringing their cause to international attention.

Women also occupied a prominent role in the movement, both in traditional ways like in administration, but also in nontraditional roles such as picketing. Women's nontraditional role in

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<sup>8</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, *Fights in the Fields*, 67.

<sup>9</sup> Shaw, *Beyond the Fields*, 18.

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the term 'boycott' originated in a response of farmers during the Irish Land War in the 1880s when Charles Boycott attempted to evict tenants off his land after a particularly poor harvest. Rather than resorting to violence, the tenants rallied everyone in the community to shun Boycott: workers stopped work in his fields, stables, and house, and local businessmen stopped trading with him; even the local postman refused to deliver his mail. Joyce Marlow, *Captain Boycott and the Irish* (New York: Harper Collins, 1973), 133-142.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Jacobs, "Friends and Foes: Religious Publications and the Delano Grape Strike and Boycott (1965-1970)," *American Catholic Studies* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2013), 25.

the UFW is exemplified by Delores Huerta, who as a cofounder and first vice-president of the union blazed a path for other women to follow. She was also the NFWA's first contract negotiator, directing the negotiation department in the early years. Collective bargaining negotiations were tedious:

*"They were difficult, and this is where persistence pay off, you just have to keep hammering away. You may have to have five meetings to change two words...this is where Cesar gets uptight. He never really quite trusted what I did until he started to negotiate himself; then he found it was pretty hard to get the kind of language that I had gotten and he started respecting what I had done."*<sup>12</sup>

Helen Chavez, Cesar's wife was also instrumental in the early days. She was the manager, bookkeeper, and sole full-time employee of the union's credit union, keeping the books for over 20 years and despite multiple audits they never found a mistake.<sup>13</sup> Both Helen and Delores were picketers during strikes, as were many other women; in fact, most of the picketers were women.

*You, come over here and hear what I've got to say! Si, usted! You—you with the stringy hair—come over here! You want to be a slave all your life? We just walked off a vineyard down the road—come out here and listen to us! What has the grower ever done for you—has he invited you to his house? Huelga!*<sup>14</sup>

Both women and men dedicated their lives to *la causa*, moving their families across the country to volunteer for the crusade. Jessica Govea, who had been a farmworker as a child, traveled to

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<sup>12</sup> Margaret Rose, "Traditional and Untraditional Patterns of Female Activism in the United Farm Workers of America, 1962-1980," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 11, no. 1, Las Chicanas (1990), 28.

<sup>13</sup> Rose, "Female Activism in the United Farm Workers," 28.

<sup>14</sup> Ferris and Sandoval, *Fight in the Fields*, 101.

Toronto and Montreal, “where she successfully persuaded supermarkets to stop buying California Grapes.”<sup>15</sup> Eliseo Medina, a farmworker with an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education moved to Chicago to direct the boycott there, personally looking up numbers to call in the yellow pages and asking them not to buy grapes. This dedication was one of the most significant assets of the NFWA and led to a breakthrough. The message from the consumers was clear—they wanted union grapes, and many growers complied:

*The immediate response from the other growers was dismay. But to my pleasant surprise...we found that six or eight of the major chain stores in Canada began calling us wanting our grapes and our brand because we had the union bug. So we had an immediate advantage over our competitors of one or two dollars a box.”*

-Lionel Steinberg—owner of three of Coachella’s biggest vineyards,  
after signing a contract with UFW in April 1970

The strike and boycott of table grapes lasted for five years, and in the end, Chavez was able to sit at the table with the growers representing the farmworkers and negotiate for better conditions. Soon after, in 1975, California passed an official law legalizing the right for workers to unionize and the NFWA officially became the United Farmworkers Union.

#### **4.1.3 Successes & Achievements**

The power of the grassroots coalition forced grape producers in Coachella and Delano to finally surrender and negotiate grape contracts. Marking a watershed, “cross-class and cross-cultural cooperation across the nation led to the passage of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, the first law to recognize the collective bargaining rights of farm workers in California.”<sup>16</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>16</sup> Rose, “Female Activism in the United Farm Workers,” 28.

farmworkers' movement had succeeded in rallying together farmworkers, students, trade unions, churches, and also the general consumer across the country, and mobilizing them to work towards a single cause. The energy and dedication of those working for the movement was one of their greatest assets. "Consumers all over the country were avoiding the fruit—something that struck fear into the hearts of agribusiness—and people were thinking about the farmworkers in a new way."<sup>17</sup> This realization of the power of the consumer in effecting agricultural policy was a major contribution of the movement.

#### **4.2 The UFW Today**

Today, the UFW is led by Arturo Rodríguez, the son-in-law of Cesar Chavez who has been president for the past 25 years since Chavez' death in 1993. However, as of December 20, 2018, he will step down and Teresa Romero, the current secretary treasurer will be taking over as the first Latina and first immigrant to become president of a national Union in the United States.<sup>18</sup> This will mark a major shift for the organization, as they seek to stay relevant in the coming decades. As far as day to day operations are concerned, the UFW is led by a small executive board as well as a handful of vice presidents located throughout the western United States. Initially focused on establishing unions with growers, the union is now focused on a few key campaigns.

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<sup>17</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, *Fights in the Fields*, 148.

<sup>18</sup> Jocelyn Sherman, "UFW's Arturo Rodriguez stepping down, replaced by first Latina & immigrant woman president of a U.S. national union," The UFW Website, entry posted Aug 28, 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190106190803/https://ufw.org/asrretiring/> (Accessed November 29, 2018).

#### **4.2.1 Current Campaigns**

United Farm Workers currently centers its efforts around five key campaigns according to their website: fighting for overtime pay, distributing ‘know your rights’ information to immigrants, seeking compensation for violations at Darigold dairies in the pacific Northwest, following up with the Gerawan Farming lawsuit, and finally, establishing and ensuring growers adhere to the new heat regulations.

The UFW was integral in getting the Fairness for Farm Workers Act written and introduced to the senate in 2018. The act was introduced by Kamala Harris of California and would extend the FLSA of 1938 to apply to agricultural workers. Currently, the FLSA guarantees overtime pay to workers who work more than 40 hours in a week, however, these requirements do not apply to workers in the agricultural sector. If it is passed, the bill would phase in overtime pay for farmworkers who work over 55 hours per week beginning in 2019 over a period of 4 years to end in overtime for any agricultural worker working over 40 hours a week in 2022 (for farms who employ 25 workers or fewer, the same requirements begin in 2022 and end in 2025).<sup>19</sup> The UFW encourages people to contact their congressional representatives and ask them to support the Farness for Farmworkers Act.

The second campaign the UFW focuses on is ensuring that farmworkers and immigrants specifically undocumented immigrants know their rights. One of their ‘know your rights’ campaigns focuses on workplace safety. Partnering with Cal/OSHA’s 99 *Calor* campaign to protect outdoor workers from heat illness, the UFW has created and circulated a ‘know your rights heat flyer’ which encourages workers to know their rights regarding accommodations owed to them by their employer when the temperature reaches a certain threshold. For example,

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<sup>19</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, *Fairness for Farmworkers Act*, HR 6230, 115<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 2017-2018.



regardless of legal status, an employer must provide free, potable, and fresh water, shade and cooldown rests that are a minimum of 5 minutes, and above 95 degrees 10-minute breaks every 2 hours. They also must provide equipment training and access to first aid or emergency medical services.<sup>20</sup> The goal of the campaign is to increase the number of growers that adhere to California regulations.

The UFW also has a ‘know your rights’ card which outlines what to do if one is approached by the police or by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE):

No abren la Puerta: Do not open the door. ICE and the police cannot enter your home without a warrant signed by a judge.

Remain Silent: ICE can use anything you say against you. Stay calm and do not run. If you run, ICE and the police will have a reason to stop you.

Do not sign anything: Do not sign any document that you do not understand without speaking with a lawyer or board of immigration appeals representative.

Report & Record: Take pictures, videos, notes of badge numbers, exactly what happened.<sup>21</sup>

The UFW offers a Deportation Family Emergency Response Plan. This pamphlet outlines what to do if a family member is deported. It includes recommendations on things such as identifying an emergency guardian for children, setting aside an emergency fund to help with expenses of the loss of a family member’s wages, a list of what children need to do in case parent don’t come

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<sup>20</sup> United Farm Workers, “Heat Flyer, English,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20190106192050/https://ufw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/HeatFlyerAbbrvEng5-22-15.pdf> (Accessed November 3, 2018).

<sup>21</sup> United Farm Workers, “Know Your Rights Flyer, English,” [https://web.archive.org/web/20190106193148/https://ufw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/KnowYourRights\\_EnglishFlyer.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20190106193148/https://ufw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/KnowYourRights_EnglishFlyer.pdf) (Accessed November 3, 2018).

home at expected time, as well as phone numbers to ICE detention, legal support and the UFW Foundation.<sup>22</sup>

The third campaign is the Gerawan case. This issue began in 1990 during a vote on whether Gerawan, one of California's largest producers of stone fruits, would allow union representation. After the vote there was widespread retaliation towards workers who voted in favor of a union in the form of illegal firings, closing of labor camps, and withholding of wages. For the next thirteen years, there were complaints of further illegal activity which included the mailing of leaflets to the farmworker community threatening workers. After years of requesting negotiations and seeking compensation, the union contract was finalized in 2013, but Gerawan refused to implement any changes and a petition was filed to end the UFW contract. Workers cast their vote, but the ballots were impounded to allow for the court case to investigate the extent of Gerawan's violations of the law. In 2016, a federal judge certified for a major lawsuit consisting of an estimated \$30 million for up to 10,000 current and former Gerawan employees. In September of 2018 the ballots were finally counted, showing an overwhelming vote opposing the UFW to represent workers: 1098 in favor of no union and 197 for the UFW.<sup>23</sup>

The Darigold case is another case UFW is pursuing on behalf of farmworkers to respond to law violations at Darigold dairies in Washington State. Darigold dairies make up 92% of Washington's dairies, and are the primary milk used by Starbucks. There were accusations of sexual harassment and other law violations, and after reporting many women were either fired or sued for complaining. The UFW encourages people to take action by emailing Starbucks CEO Kevin Johnson (they provide a pre-formatted letter) asking him to speak out against these

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<sup>22</sup> United Farm Workers Foundation, "Deportation Family Emergency Response Plan," <https://web.archive.org/web/20190106193317/https://ufw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/deportation.pdf> (Accessed November 3, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> There were 2000 worker ballots; 635 of them were disputed and not counted.

injustices and stop supplying his company with milk from these farms. The UFW is also asking Starbucks to work collaboratively with them to ensure no Darigold member faces retaliation for speaking out about the conditions of their work.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the UFW has done tremendous work on heat regulations for agricultural workers. The 2012 case of *Bautista v the State of California* brought attention to the egregious violations occurring throughout the state. The case illuminated not only violations but also a lack of attempts to keep farmworkers safe on the part of Cal/OSHA. For example, the UFW formally complained of unwarranted abandonment of investigations when they observed “approximately 25 workers at Valpredo Farms toiling in 90-degree heat with only a small beach umbrella provided for shade as pictured below. Another crew of 40 was provided no shade at all.” There are multiple citations of violations, totaling over a thousand workers including Maria de Jesus Bautista, Jose Macarena Hernandez, and Jorge Herrera who all died from working in extreme heat.<sup>24</sup> The response from Cal/OSHA was that the employer could not be found at the location and so it assumed that the hazards had been corrected.<sup>25</sup> The court case was a success for the UFW, and led to a good settlement for the families of deceased farmworkers. Below is an excerpt from the original complaint which led to the case, in lieu of the workers’ original voices:

*Audon Felix Garcia died July 9, 2008 after working loading grape boxes into a truck in 112-degree weather from morning to early afternoon that day in Kern County. He was 42 years old and had 15 years of experience with field work. An ambulance was called, but*

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<sup>24</sup> *Bautista v. State of California*, No. BC418871, (2012) 201 Cal.App.4<sup>th</sup> 716, Superior Court of the State of California, complaint filed Jan 29, 2010, 14-22. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190106193507/https://ufw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/BautistaOctober2012Complaint.pdf> (Accessed November 4, 2018).

<sup>25</sup> *Bautista v. State of California*, 12.

*he could not be revived in time. Audon Felix's core body temperature was 108 degrees Fahrenheit at the time of his death.*

*Jose Macarena Hernandez, 63, died June 20, 2008 from heat stroke after harvesting strawberries that day in Santa Barbara County in record-breaking 110-degree heat. He was found dead in the fields by a co-worker.*

*Jorge Herrera was 37 years old when he died on July 31, 2008 from heat stroke. He had been working loading table grapes in Kern County when he collapsed...and was taken to the hospital. He had a core body temperature of 108 degrees and was diagnosed with kidney failure and brain damage. He died after remaining in critical condition for two weeks. He left behind a wife and two children, ages 4 and 7.<sup>26</sup>*

Largely as a result of *Bautista v. the State of California*, the state passed new heat regulations and Cal/OSHA must adhere to the Heat Illness Prevention Regulation Amendments outlining the specific requirements for water, shade, and access to emergency response. For example, these new regulations specify that “employees should not have to cross traffic or waterways to reach the shade.”<sup>27</sup> It specifies that water must be fresh and fit to drink (i.e. potable). It also offers guidelines for a “preventative cool-down rest” that is optional for workers and requires that an employer must designate a person who can immediately contact emergency services on behalf of the employees.

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<sup>26</sup> *Bautista v. State of California*, 22.

<sup>27</sup> *California Code of Regulations*, “Heat Illness Prevention Regulation Amendments: Guidance for Employers and Employees on the New Requirements,” Title 8, section 2295 (May 14, 2015), 2.

### **4.3 Critiques**

Despite the organization's successes, there have been many critiques of the UFW. These critiques include criticism of the tactics of the movement at its height in the mid 70s, critiques of Chavez' leadership, and critiques of the UFW as it exists today.

Few would contest that in its prime, the UFW had a tremendous impact on the working conditions of farmworkers under union contracts in California. They were a major reason the bracero program was finally ended in 1964. Their power in community organizing and rallying large groups of people behind a cause resulted in thousands of farmworkers in California coming under union contracts, having limits on the work day, and other financial and health-related benefits. However, as time went on, the tactics they used and the policies the organization endorsed came under scrutiny.

Perhaps the largest critique is directed towards Chavez and his style of leadership, and ultimately, it could be argued that his self-promoting style of leadership led to the organization's downfall. A union is not a movement, nor is a man. And a man who places himself at the center neglecting all else will not succeed.

#### ***4.3.1 Critique of Chavez' Leadership as Head of the Union***

The statement that most accurately summarizes the critiques of Chavez and his leadership of the UFW is from Miriam Pawel: "The history of the United Farm Workers union begins and ends with Cesar Chavez."<sup>28</sup> It certainly began with him, and from her investigative research on the UFW from the perspective, not of Chavez but from the key players, shows the truth of this

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<sup>28</sup> Miriam Pawel, *Union of Their Dreams: Power, Hope, and Struggle in Cesar Chavez's Farm Worker Movement* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010), ix.

statement. In *The Union of the Dreams*, she levels the critique that many have had before her, that it was ultimately Cesar's failures that resulted in the downfall of the union.

Cesar's primary flaw in leadership was that he was not in solidarity with the group he was intending to represent. Yates puts it well, that in his approach to leadership, "he did not believe the words of Eugene Debs: "I do not want to rise above the working class; I want to rise with them.""<sup>29</sup> Yet according to multiple accounts he was uninterested in rising with them, instead he seemed to imagine himself separate from them. This was evident in how he positioned himself as the head of the movement, had major issues when farmworkers themselves challenged his ideas, and evident even in the location of the UFW headquarters in Bakersfield, far removed from the fields in which the farmworkers worked.

There is no doubt that Cesar suffered. His hunger strikes, ambitious work schedule, and his dedication to the cause was undeniable. He used this ammunition to gain and to keep power. When confronted, he would often defer to his dedication to put an end to any issues. For example, when challenged about his refusal to accept some washing machines for use by union volunteers and his sexist remarks about doing laundry, he responded with narrowed eyes, "I work eighteen fucking hours a day for the union. Which of you can say the same?" He loved playing the martyr.<sup>30</sup>

Chavez' Catholic background was a major influence in his leadership. Religion played a positive role in that it incited in him the desire to work for justice, yet as time went on, his arrogance and desire to be viewed as a martyr led to ineffective leadership not in line with the religious goals he claimed to support. When he was young, Chavez met a priest who ministered

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<sup>29</sup> Michael D. Yates, "The Rise and Fall of the United Farm Workers: Review of Union of their Dreams," *Monthly Review* 62, no. 1 (May 1, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

to Mexican American migrant workers. The priest took Chavez under his wing, instructing him on Catholic teachings about worker rights. Chavez said, “I would do anything to get Father to tell me more about labor history. I began going to the bracero (guest worker) camps with him to help with the Mass, to the city jail to talk to the prisoners, anything to be with him.”<sup>31</sup> According to the Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chavez based his activism on the principles of faith, fasting, and Church teachings on justice. He was guided by “Catholic teachings about respect for the dignity of each human person, the nobility of work, and the responsibility of all people to contribute to the common good and to be wise stewards of the goods of the earth.”<sup>32</sup> This commitment to faith and action formed the basis for the UFW, and Chavez’ ability to arouse deep sentiments of self-respect and justice is the reason why it was so successful in its early years. This commitment to faith and action is also a reason I chose this particular organization to evaluate, especially since this paper advocates for movements based in faith and action.

The role of religion for Chavez and the early organization enabled it to garner support not only from Catholic congregations and bishops, but also from the California Migrant Ministry, an ecumenical Protestant group dedicated at serving migrant workers. This role of faith has often been left out of most accounts of the movement, and some suggest that, “contrary to common historical record, it was [Chavez’] personal spirituality and not a secularized ‘ideology’ that informed his activism.”<sup>33</sup> The importance of fasting, a sacred practice and one of the aspects that made the organization’s boycotts so effective, originated in Chavez’ spiritual convictions.

However, some critics say these fasts served more as an opportunity for Chavez to play the

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<sup>31</sup> Catholic Church, “Life in Christ Part Two: The Principles of the Christian Moral Life,” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006), 323.

<sup>32</sup> Catholic Church, 324.

<sup>33</sup> Ronald A. Wells, “Cesar Chavez’s Protestant Allies: The California Migrant Ministry and the Farm Workers,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* (2009): 6.

martyr and seek attention than as mainstays of his Catholic faith. Yet still others insist that “all the fasts, the long marches and insistence on personal sacrifice...were not publicity gimmicks, they were the essential Chavez.”<sup>34</sup>

The sincerity of Chavez’ faith may be true, but his actions, especially as the organization grew, were not reflective of the spiritual icon some claim him to be—their accounts usually end at the height of the UFW before questionable behaviors were commonplace. One particularly concerning incident was the departure of Chris Hartmire from the organization. Chris Hartmire was involved with the La Causa from the outset, even before the UFW had become an official union. As an ordained Presbyterian minister and director of the California Migrant Ministry (CMM), Hartmire was a key figure in California farmworker advocacy and ministry. In his role at the CMM, he made the organization an “invaluable ally to Chavez in providing a religious presence in the movement in its earliest days, lending credibility to Chavez in fending off charges he was engaged in anti-American activities.”<sup>35</sup> During the celebration Mass marking the end of the Delano grape strike at which Chavez broke his twenty-five-day fast, Hartmire served the host to Chavez, his wife Helen and Robert Kennedy. Hartmire was so dedicated to the movement that he quit his job at the CMM and moved his family to the union headquarters to dedicate himself solely to the UFW. He became Chavez’ closest advisor and the secretary-treasurer of the UFW. However, in 1989, Hartmire “suddenly found himself embroiled in a controversy that reflected the continuing conflict and paranoia infesting the UFW’s management.”<sup>36</sup> He was accused of aiding an accountant who had defrauded the union of funds.

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<sup>34</sup> Ronald A. Wells, “Cesar Chavez’s Protestant Allies: The California Migrant Ministry and the Farm Workers,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* (2009): 6-7.

<sup>35</sup> Roger Bruns, *Encyclopedia of Cesar Chavez: The Farm Workers’ Fight for Rights and Justice* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2013), 121.

<sup>36</sup> Bruns, *Encyclopedia of Cesar Chavez*, 122.



The board, led by Chavez, made Hartmire the scapegoat. Chavez icily berated him, saying he had seen it coming, that he had been telling Delores Huerta of his betrayal for months. “Chris was becoming the most despicable noun in Huerta’s vocabulary: a traitor.”<sup>37</sup> Chris resigned, and he and his wife, Pudge, moved away yet he kept noticing a farmworker he had met in Salinas following him, and realized he was being tailed. “Such a humiliating and devastating attack against Hartmire, a man whose loyalty to Chavez had never been in question, inflicted deep emotional scars on the minister.” In their annual Christmas letter, Chris and Pudge notified friends and family of their change of address: “After 27 years with ...the UFW this was not an easy change and 1989 has not been a normal or a tranquil year. But here we are and here we plan to stay—and as we approach Advent we are tired but in good spirits and hopeful about the future.”<sup>38</sup>

This treatment of Chris Hartmire, one of Chavez’ closest friends, advisors and spiritual mentors, speaks for itself. As time went on, Chavez’ leadership tactics became even more erratic and more isolating. Many other prominent leaders in the union were fired without cause, accused of conspiring against the union, had their pay revoked, or were transferred out of state without explanation. In addition, Chavez’ use of The Game, a supposed team-building technique where union members voiced their complaints to one another in often angry and profane bouts of screaming, called into question his ability and desire to grow or maintain the former success of the union. Ultimately, Chavez as well as other union leaders failed to pass on their vision to future leaders, and after Chavez’ death the union slipped in to a slow decline.

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<sup>37</sup> Union of Their Dreams 324.

<sup>38</sup> Union of Their Dreams, 235.

#### ***4.3.2 Who is not at the Table: Farmworkers and Immigrants***

Another critique, in addition to the critique of Cesar's leadership, is what was missing from the movement: farmworkers and immigrants. Both of these groups were major missing pieces of Cesar's strategy. His decision to oppose illegal immigration hindered the union's ability to organize undocumented workers, and his decision to micromanage and isolate power at the top instead of allowing farmworkers to implement their ideas caused mistrust and separation within the union. These two aspects, coupled with his poor leadership skills especially towards the end, ultimately caused the downfall of the union. Creating a movement for farmworkers and not allowing them nor immigrants to play a central role could never be a successful formula.

This omission was perhaps the most damaging part of his leadership—to neglect the group the movement was supposed to be representing. Yet Chavez maintained that they must be omitted from the movement, in leadership and in vision. On the surface, Chavez empowered the workers, but when it came down to it, he did not: “You don’t want farm workers managing the union right now. With the attitude they have on money, it would be a total god damn disaster, it would be chaotic. Unless they’re taught the other life, it wouldn’t work.”<sup>39</sup> Even in the 1970s the board was entirely made up of white people, and most of the employees were white and had never been farmworkers. The situation has not changed today, as the majority of board members are white and far removed from the fields and farmworker communities.

Another critique of the UFW during its height was its approach towards immigrants. While it has since changed its stance, and today advocates on behalf of undocumented immigrants, in the 1970s the UFW staunchly opposed immigration. The reason for this was

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<sup>39</sup> Miriam Pawel, *Union of Their Dreams: Power, Hope, and Struggle in Cesar Chavez's Farm Worker Movement* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010), 185.

during that time, local labor was being replaced by cheaper immigrant laborers who would put up with worse working conditions. The UFW was born out of this need for local farmworkers to have a leg to stand on to demand fairer conditions. The UFW opposed immigration for two reasons: one, immigrant labor threatened local farmworkers, and two, during union strikes, workers on strike were replaced by immigrant labor. As a result, the UFW began the Campaign Against Illegals. “If we can get the illegals out of California and Arizona we can win the strike overnight,” said Chavez.<sup>40</sup> So, the UFW tried to get the government to set up deportations, but the government, who sided with the growers, always had a new supply of migrant labors ready to work when local farmworkers went on strike.<sup>41</sup>

Within the organization, the decision on whether or not ‘illegals’ (as Cesar referred to them) should be allowed in organizing was a heated point of discussion. Some members held that undocumented immigrants could be organized just as any other workers and went about organizing those who planned to vote for the union. Others disagreed, but still recognized their importance to the union’s success: “[We won’t] ask whether the worker [is] illegal or not, but if we lose [the] election then we’ll blow the whistle on him!”<sup>42</sup> However, Cesar remained opposed to their involvement, claiming, “illegals...are our biggest problem.”<sup>43</sup> Cesar wanted to exclude the undocumented workers, and at his most extreme point, believed that the CIA was bringing radicals across the border, and if allowed to stay that they would incite a communist revolution.<sup>44</sup> The organization could never get on the same page regarding this issue. This neglect of two primary groups in agriculture was a major reason the movement failed.

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<sup>40</sup> Pawel, *Union of Their Dreams*, 141.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Matthew Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 150.

<sup>43</sup> Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory*, 151.

<sup>44</sup> Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory*, 150.

### ***4.3.3 Critique of the UFW Today***

In its current state, the UFW is a shell of its former self, a symbol of a movement that once had momentum but whose current primary concern is the preservation of legacy, not organizing in the fields. Arturo Rodriguez is the current president, and has been since Cesar's death in 1993, and the UFW is more of a politically-involved fundraising organization than a union run to benefit farmworkers. In fact, in 2002, the UFW shifted its focus away from the agricultural worker sector, with the board deleting all references in their constitution to agricultural workers, instead saying its focus would be on the Latino population in the US in general.<sup>45</sup> "We'll never abandon farmworkers by any means, or rural communities. But we certainly don't want to position the organization of the future of the organization to only be dependent on that," said president Arturo Rodriguez.<sup>46</sup> Such an ironic statement, since it is the farmworkers that are typically dependent on the union. Since the change, they have worked to raise millions of dollars to build low income housing in New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, and California, though most of these housing units are not located in rural farming areas, very few are for farmworkers, and almost all housing has been built with nonunion labor. For example, the UFW rejected a union roofing contractor's bid, specifically citing the reason as the union bid was too high, which brought a wave of criticism.<sup>47</sup>

The UFW also focuses on fundraising. Donations account for almost a third of UFW's budget: over 2 million dollars a year. However, the money it raises rarely is put towards

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<sup>45</sup> Miriam Pawel, "Farmworkers Reap Little as Union Strays from its Roots," *Los Angeles Times* (Jan 8, 2006) <https://web.archive.org/web/20190105060430/https://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-ufw8jan08-story.html> (Accessed November 22, 2018).

<sup>46</sup> Miriam Pawel, "Farmworkers Reap Little as Union Strays from its Roots."

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

farmworkers. Instead, UFW spends much of its money on political influence. After discovering in a poll that it was viewed as the top name to trust among Latino votes, it began running political campaigns in areas where an affiliation with the UFW would help the causes. For example, in 2005 the UFW was paid \$75,000 by the Viejas Indians to campaign for the approval for a casino in the Imperial Valley.<sup>48</sup> While the UFW did use their political influence to pass regulations for heat dangers to farmworkers as discussed above, much of their political involvement is not related to farmworkers at all, for example, their campaign for gay marriage.<sup>49</sup>

This critique that the UFW is not relevant for farmworkers has been paralleled in the lack of farmworker votes in support of having a the UFW represent them. Across the board, farmworkers are voting in favor to decertify the UFW to represent them. In September of 2018, the ballots of workers at Gerawan were finally counted after five years of being impounded by the Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB). The original election was held on Nov 5, 2013, but after the votes were cast, the UFW requested that the ballots be impounded and not counted because it alleged that Gerawan manipulated the vote and it was “impossible to know [the workers’] true sentiments.”<sup>50</sup> The California Supreme Court decided the ballots should be counted, and the results were 1,098 to 197, a 5-to-1 margin in favor to decertify the UFW as their representative.<sup>51</sup> Silvia Lopez, a farmworker working for Gerawan led the campaign against the UFW. It is tragic and ironic, that again, the farmworkers have no allies: they work for a company accused of wrongdoing, withholding wages, illegal firings, yet has zero trust in the organization that should be standing up for them. It is yet to be seen who will represent the farmworkers since

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Dan Wheat, “Farmworkers Reject UFW in Long-fought Election,” *Capital Press* (September 19, 2018) [https://web.archive.org/web/20190106205624/https://www.capitalpress.com/state/california/farmworkers-reject-ufw-in-long-fought-election/article\\_b7a53a88-b179-53f5-9dec-6350b01d694a.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20190106205624/https://www.capitalpress.com/state/california/farmworkers-reject-ufw-in-long-fought-election/article_b7a53a88-b179-53f5-9dec-6350b01d694a.html) (Accessed December 5, 2018).

<sup>51</sup> Of the 1930 ballots, 635 were disputed and were not counted.

the UFW will challenge the vote, yet it seems to send a clear message that the UFW has lost its relevancy among California farmworkers.

At the peak of the movement in 1973 the UFW had 60,000 members, with its sights set on reaching 100,000 in the coming years. As of 2015, according to the Office of Labor Management Standards, the UFW had 8,274 members.<sup>52</sup> These 8,000 members account for almost 2% of the current 450,000 farmworkers laboring in California.<sup>53</sup> The president won't release a list of the contracts they still have, but none remain in the table grape vineyards of the Central Valley where the movement began.<sup>54</sup> In 2016, Foster Poultry Farms in Livingston, CA filed to decertify their workers resulting in 2300 full time and regular part time employees leaving the union.<sup>55</sup> The UFW recognizes its irrelevance, and some speculate that is why it didn't want the Gerawan votes counted, because they knew what the vote would be, some even suggesting that the ALRB "was attempting to shield the UFW from the humiliation of its irrelevance."<sup>56</sup> The UFW recognizes this problem. With the change of power from president Arturo Rodriguez to Teresa Romero, the first Latina and immigrant woman president of a US national union, it remains to be seen whether this change in leadership will change the efficacy of the union.

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<sup>52</sup> The Center for Union Facts, "United Farm Workers: Basic Information," 2019, [https://web.archive.org/web/20190106222154/https://www.unionfacts.com/union/United\\_Farm\\_Workers](https://web.archive.org/web/20190106222154/https://www.unionfacts.com/union/United_Farm_Workers) (Accessed December 16, 2018).

<sup>53</sup> Matt Garcia, "Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Movement," *Oxford Research Encyclopedias of American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, May 2016).

<sup>54</sup> Miriam Pawel, "Farmworkers Reap Little as Union Strays from its Roots."

<sup>55</sup> The Center for Union Facts, "Case: Foster Poultry Farms (32-RD-180667), 2019 [https://web.archive.org/web/20190106222557/https://www.unionfacts.com/rd/32-RD-180667/Foster\\_Poultry\\_Farms](https://web.archive.org/web/20190106222557/https://www.unionfacts.com/rd/32-RD-180667/Foster_Poultry_Farms) (Accessed December 16, 2018).

<sup>56</sup> Dan Wheat, "Farmworkers Reject UFW," *Capital Press*.

#### ***4.3.4 Ecofeminist Critique***

Much of an ecofeminist critique would echo the concerns presented above, such as the neglect of vulnerable populations of undocumented immigrants, or the injustice and hypocrisy within the organization's leadership. While the critique of fair trade focuses more on the problems of the premise being based on questionable principles, the critique of the UFW is less about the foundation but more in regard to how it was carried out. At least in the early days, the UFW represented a movement that ecofeminists could endorse with exception of some questionable practices which have been detailed above. At its inception, the UFW was a growing force seeking to disrupt the abusive labor practices in agriculture by rallying together grassroots support to peacefully confront the growers. These goals and method were mostly in line with ecofeminist thought. However, as the organization grew, its goals and methods changed and ultimately morphed into something fewer people would stand behind. These criticisms have been covered in detail above, so the ecofeminist critique component will be somewhat more concise and function as an extension of the criticisms leveled above. The intersectional critique will respond to both the model (excluding people of color from positions of power), and execution (allowing farmworkers to boycott and strike but not hold positions of power within).

##### ***4.3.4.a Critique of Hierarchal Value Structures in the UFW***

While the UFW does not blatantly uphold hierarchal and dualistic value systems as much as fair trade, they still operate within the framework established by these hierarchal value systems, and has not gone far enough to break down the hierarchies. To their credit, they worked hard to give a voice and platform to those who have been historically oppressed, and succeeded in creating a movement by farmworkers, for farmworkers. In addition, they squarely confronted

the power of the wealthy growers. Yet their efforts seem to have stalled, and today the organization is more a reminder that these hierarchies exist, rather than an organization actively working to dismantle them.

The union was the strongest when the farmworkers held the most power. As time went on, and Chavez sought more power, attention, and authority over the movement, it destabilized. The ways in which he structured the organization especially in the later years prioritized a damaging hierarchal structure, mirroring that which ecofeminists have denounced. Chavez fought brutally to keep himself at the top, distancing, literally, those who questioned his decisions or had grown in their position to the point where they seemed like a threat to his authority.

#### *4.3.4.b Critique of Patriarchy in the UFW*

Here too, the UFW deserves both praise and criticism. In the early days, the UFW could be praised for facilitating women to be involved at every level from fieldwork to leadership. They consciously broke gender roles, to the point of newspaper *El Malcriado* posting photos of Chavez washing dishes, an unconventional pose for a Mexican man.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the boycott was a call for all Americans to question the larger system which provided their food, and ultimately prioritized the voice of the people over the finances of the grower. The power was in the hands of the farmworkers and the people, as evidenced by the eventual yielding of the wealthy growers to the demands of the union.

However, the UFW did not go far enough to overthrow patriarchal power systems due to underlying sexism within the organization. In fact, Pawel identifies that Chavez' most famous

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<sup>57</sup> Ferris and Sandoval, *Fight in the Fields*, 101.



quote has been rewritten. The original quote reads, “The strongest act of manliness is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally non-violent struggle for justice. To be a man is to suffer for others. God help me to be a man.” But the quote to the mourners at Chavez’ funeral substituted humanity and humanness, so it read to be human is to suffer.”<sup>58</sup> As Pawel concludes, “political correctness trumped truth,” and set the stage for how the union presented itself to the public. Those who came after him had learned how to rewrite history to suit their needs.<sup>59</sup> To some extent, one could see this as representative of the times and of changing societal perceptions of gender, yet a conscious and spotlighted effort to not only lift up women, but to dismantle patriarchal systems of power was and is still largely absent from the UFW.

Furthermore, some scholars have pointed out that the UFW employed a “significant and strategic use of a gendered sexual rhetoric” to garner support from the religious community, Catholics in particular. Ana Raquel Minian documents how the UFW led a campaign against “indiscriminate and shameless sex,” in an effort to construct “an idealized figure of the physically disciplined resident/laborer deserving of rights.”<sup>60</sup> The UFW intentionally contrasted this idealized respectable union member against union opponents who the UFW portrayed as physically unrestrained, sexually depraved, prone to homosexuality, and reckless. The union accomplished this through several tactics, including tirades on sexuality during speeches and rallies, forbidding specific practices by union members, and using heteronormative discourse to advance its cause. At a speech to the Catholic Newman Club at the University of New Mexico in 1967, Chavez criticized birth control and distribution programs.<sup>61</sup> The UFW ensured that “the

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<sup>58</sup> Pawel, *Union of their Dreams*, 328.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ana Raquel Minian, “‘Indiscriminate and Shameless Sex’: The Strategic Use of Sexuality by the United Farm Workers,” *American Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (March 2013): 63.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 63.

evil ‘S’ word (sex) was ruled taboo for ‘single’ organizers.”<sup>62</sup> Political cartoons published in *El Malcriado*, attacked opponents such as growers and Teamsters “by portraying them as sexual and gender transgressors.” For example, one cartoon depicts a grower who has jumped on top of a chair to protect himself from a windup mouse carrying a sign that reads “Huelga!” He is dressed in female drag, and his dress has flown up revealing his feminine underwear. This portrayal enables the UFW to ridicule the grower for his “gender deviance, which is associated with his irrational fear of the strike...[and] to ridicule his supporters as feminine, cowardly, and absurd.”<sup>63</sup> By playing into dualistic gendered stereotypes, the UFW enabled their union farmworkers to be released from the negative stereotypes that linked farmworkers to, “Mexican immigration, illegality, licentiousness, and prostitution.”<sup>64</sup> Instead, it gained the support of religious groups and the American public by painting a picture of farmworkers as respectable champions of sexual purity, moral discipline, and religious fervor.

#### *4.3.4.c Critique of Racism and Anti-Immigrant Stance of UFW*

Although the leaders of the movement were Hispanic, racism was a big issue within the organization, demonstrating the strength of systemic racism and how it was so pervasive. Even though UFW was a minority-led organization, it was not immune to structural racism. Yates notices regarding the executive board, that “few staffers were former farmworkers; most were Anglos including the attorneys. I believe this was intentional. It prevented the formation of power bases that might challenge Chavez.”<sup>65</sup> Today there are complaints that the UFW uses the struggle of non-white people to make a profit. Some farmworkers have protested because the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>65</sup> Yates, “The Rise and Fall of the United Farm Workers.”

UFW uses their story to get donations but does little to nothing to help them. This exploitation is a huge point of contention among the farmworker community.

The role of religion in the UFW was split, and it contributed substantially to both the cause of the deeply religious farmworkers most of whom grew up in Catholic-dominated Latin America, but also to the opposition of *La Causa*. Both Protestant and Catholic churches that were involved with the movement did little to address this blatant lack of diversity in leadership, likely because leadership within the UFW mirrored that of the church in terms of the lack of women and Latinx people. Even Chavez' own congregation was not behind his Easter march of penance from Delano to Sacramento. Chris Hartmire faced widespread backlash from congregations near and far in response to his work within the California Migrant Ministry, mainly because growers held power in local churches and had influence over congregations further removed. Christian groups such as the Delano Ministerial Association as well as the Protestant churches and Episcopal diocese called the CMM unethical and passed resolutions condemning the organization, requesting that their contributions be cancelled.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, when Hartmire traveled to speak at church meetings, he was met by large hostile crowds.<sup>67</sup> These groups were typically American Christian dioceses or organizations and failed to take into account that the Body of Christ exists not just in the US, but also, and even more so, outside the country. While *La Causa* divided leadership in American Christian denominations, religion served to unite the farmworkers it represented. The religious iconography Chavez employed to rally farmworkers to join the *peregrinación* to Sacramento on Good Friday served to unite the workers

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<sup>66</sup> Pawel, *Union of their Dreams*, 18.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

in their shared Mexican and Latin American traditions, and obligate Catholic churches on the route to open their doors to the penitents.<sup>68</sup>

#### *4.3.4.d Critique of Disregard for the Earth within UFW*

Care for the earth was perhaps the most neglected aspect of the UFW from an ecofeminist perspective. The environment was not a priority, except insofar as it directly impacted the health of farmworkers working in the fields. They did lobby to ban the most dangerous pesticides, but it was only seen as important to protect the workers as opposed to the larger issue of protecting the earth as a whole. Today, the UFW pays little attention to issues affecting the environment, and despite its various political undertakings, it has no vision related to environmental protection or advocacy.

### **4.4 Final Evaluation: Successes & Failures**

Reflecting on the history of the UFW as well as its activity today, it has had some high points and some disconcerting low points too. Its successes were the incredible organizing at the grassroots level exemplified in the dedication of leaders like Chris and Pudge Hartmire, a pastor and his wife who dedicated decades to the movement. However, the couple's abrupt and forced exit from the UFW epitomizes the internal power struggles that eventually led to the downfall of the organization. The UFW accomplished what other efforts had been unable to do: pass statewide legislation upholding the rights of farmworkers in California, yet their once widespread reach has collapsed—contracts have been lost, farmworkers have voted against their representation, and in terms of a union, they are currently ineffectual. The diversity of

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 20.

involvement in a movement that originated from the workers should act as a model of how to bring attention to an issue and involve a broad spectrum of people, yet the movement was not radical enough to acknowledge let alone tackle larger societal problems.

## CHAPTER 5:

### An Intersectional Ecofeminist Land Labor Ethic

#### **5.1 Goals for this Chapter: Moral Principles for a Land Labor Ethic**

This chapter will pull together three concepts from prior chapters: 1) the major challenges farmworkers face, 2) the four central themes of ecofeminism that are a resource for farmworker justice, and 3) the critiques of farmworker initiatives. This information will be combined in order to create a set of principles from which one may build more effective initiatives for farmworkers. These four principles will be based on the four central critiques of intersectional ecofeminism and will comprise my proposed intersectional ecofeminist land labor ethic.

I will identify four moral principles of a land labor ethic, and each will correspond to one of the four major concerns of intersectional ecofeminism. Essentially, each principle will respond to the critiques and problems that arise because of that issue. The principle of *diversity* responds to hierarchies and dualisms; the principle of *radicality* responds to patriarchal power systems; the principle of *solidarity* responds to institutional racism; and the principle *enrichment* responds to neglect of the earth.

While each principle originates from a major critique of ecofeminism, the corresponding principles do not only address that specific critique, but also a broader range of problems ecofeminism identifies. For example, diversity originates in response to the prioritization of a singular group being privileged and lifted up, and while it necessitates lifting up those who have been historically othered, it also addresses critiques involving patriarchal power structures and structural racism by involving voices of women and people of color.

In each section for each principle, I will first describe what I mean by each principle and how it responds to the corresponding intersectional ecofeminist critique. I will then provide some discussion on its relation to the shortcomings of fair trade and the UFW. I will end each section by providing a couple real life examples including possible praxis outlets for each principle. Ecofeminism is still an emerging field, and as such, it remains to be seen the complete form ecofeminist praxis remains will take, however based on the problems that have been addressed thus far, the following four principles form a starting framework for continued praxis accompanying one's faith.

## **5.2 Principle of Diversity**

### ***5.2.1 Why Diversity***

Pulling from ecofeminist literature on the importance of recognizing diversity, as well as some postcolonial literature on the historical lack of diversity in knowledge formation, diversity is one of my key principles for an ecofeminist ethic of land labor. Vandana Shiva repeatedly stresses the importance of diversity, in seed selection, in suppliers of wheat, and in strains of rice. For her, "uniformity is like fascism, while diversity equals freedom."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Hathaway and Boff stress the importance of diversity and the dangers of homogenization, citing that a loss of diversity is a sign of a civilization in decline.<sup>2</sup> Postcolonial writers name the dangers of a lack of diversity in knowledge creation, drawing upon the missing voices in the writing of history, formation of theories, and predominant narratives. Gayatri Spivak argues that not only are voices

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<sup>1</sup> Vandana Shiva, "Diversity is the Answer," interview by Alma de Walsche, trans. Freddy de Preter, *Mondiaal Nieuws* (November 21, 2013) <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.mo.be/en/article/vandana-shiva-diversity-answer> (Accessed January 6, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Hathaway and Boff, 52.

of non-western white people missing, but that they in fact, cannot speak due to a long history of silencing, despite well-intentioned efforts to give them<sup>3</sup> a platform or a voice.<sup>4</sup> It is vital that people others than the writers of the dominant narrative of history define the problems, and state their needs.

This concept of diversity refers to diversity of approaches to farmworker justice, diversity of authority forming knowledge about the issues, or even diversity within the food system. An intersectional ecofeminist ethic must embrace diversity in all forms.

### ***5.2.2 How Diversity Responds to Hierarchy and Dualistic Thinking***

Diversity is a response to hierarchal and dualistic thinking because it is a decentralization of power and authority that breaks down the ladder on which white men occupy the highest rung. Responding to the ecofeminist critique of hierarchal dualisms, this conception of diversity allows for those who have been historically oppressed and silenced to reclaim the voice that was taken away. This conception of prioritizing diversity requires those who have intellectual privilege to make space which may in some cases involve stepping down or off the ladder.

Responding to the critique that some groups have been radically excluded, the response is not how do those at the top of the ladder include the Other in their success. Instead, allowing for a multiplicity of ideas, approaches, perspectives, and people will cause power dynamics based on hierarchy and exclusion to be weakened.

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<sup>3</sup> Note the intentional wording of *give them* here, connoting both power in the holding of something the other does not have, and supremacy in locating the speaker in the 'us' ingroup above 'them:' two reasons why 'giving them' a voice does not allow them to speak.

<sup>4</sup> Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).



Practicing diversity calls for a complete reevaluation of what we believe. This means being quiet to allow for other viewpoints to be heard. It should not be assumed that only one group has the answer, that there is one ‘right’ answer, or that those talking have the best answer. What is needed is sometimes a cooperative, sometimes a disparate approach to the multiplicity of problems affecting farmworkers. Fair working conditions and pay will not come from a single solution. Certifying every company in the world as fair-trade will not solve the problem. What is needed is more than we know, and we should start looking outside the dominant paradigm for answers.

The call for diversity also applies to the need for diversity in the food system. Our former subsistence farming culture has given way to monoculture, with little diversity in the foods available to the average person, and a lack of diversity in the leading food suppliers. In the United States, there are only a handful of food producers that control every level of production like General Mills, Nestle, and Tyson. By diversifying our eating habits and increasing the avenues through which we receive food, power will be redistributed. For example, those with expendable income in middle to upper socioeconomic statuses could diversify their food sources by sourcing herbs from their own garden, vegetables from a community garden, fruit from a CSA program, honey from a farmers’ market, and cheese from a local dairy. This diversification of food sourcing is possible outside higher income communities as well—fruit trucks are a popular source of produce in urban, suburban, and agricultural neighborhoods; urban community gardens have grown substantially in the past decade; and many churches have gardens maintained by congregation members. Through this type of consumption pattern, large agribusinesses lose their monopolies and a range of people closer to the earth are empowered. This model of eating also allows for an increase in diversity in crops which has significantly

declined over the past century, not only in the variety of fruits and vegetables available but in the genetic make-up of those crops. Increasing diversity will result in better nutrition and a better ability to adapt to climate change.

### ***5.2.3 Commentary on Diversity in Fair Trade and the UFW***

Both the UFW and the fair trade movement could benefit from practicing diversity. Fair trade took one approach to a specific problem and applied it globally, without consideration of the variety of cultures, conditions and unique problems farmers around the world are facing. This is similar to how monocropping does not consider the needs of the land or the farmer but only of the market. This approach will only bring more problems. The problem of exploitation of farmworkers is not the result of a single issue so it should not be expected that a single solution will rectify the situation.

The UFW in its earliest days made significant strides in practicing diversity. This was exemplified in the early days of the UFW where organizers were sent to a new community and given the liberty to approach that territory in whichever way they saw fit based on their education of the community and its concerns. This model was successful. Yet the UFW stalled because of Chavez' desire to control, his attitude of 'his way or the highway,' and his fear of differing opinions for how the union should operate. By firing and silencing those beneath him, he crushed diversity within the union, ending any opportunity for growth before it began.

What is needed is a variety of ideas and different approaches working simultaneously. If that solution seems a little chaotic, it may well be, but perhaps, approaches to solve complex problems ought not to be linear and tightly controlled, and that expectation is only based on rational Western thought. In India, women select different rice seed for different seasons,

climates, altitudes, and tastes, selecting the one that will perform the best in each specific situation. Genetically, a region planted with this wide variety of rice plants may look like chaos, but when the temperatures drop on the high slopes of the mountain, and a heat wave hovers over inland areas, and the farmer sets to make dessert from their sweet rice, each strain will have successfully served its purpose. Perhaps the best solution is to let go of hierarchal structures and order and embrace a little chaos.

#### ***5.2.4 Practical Directions for Praxis***

One excellent example of practicing diversity in an approach to farmworker justice is the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in the south east United States. Harvard Business Review calls the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) one of 15 most world-changing initiatives.<sup>5</sup> Through a network of organizations including churches and faith-based organizations, student centers, non-profits, and farmworkers, the coalition has succeeded in “systematically bringing many of the nation’s largest restaurants and grocers—including McDonald’s, Walmart, and Trader Joes—to concede to their demands for better wages and working conditions...[resulting in] a 50 to 70 percent increase in their take-home pay, along with substantially improved and independently monitored working conditions in the fields.”<sup>6</sup> In addition, the CIW reports that sexual assault has been eliminated from farms across seven states at farms employing over 35,000 workers.<sup>7</sup> They attribute their success to their model of worker-driven social responsibility (WSR). Worker-driven social responsibility is a model of social change which

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<sup>5</sup> Susan Wolf Ditkoff and Abe Grindle, “Audacious Philanthropy: The Fair Food Program,” *Harvard Business Review* (September/October 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Ditkoff and Grindle, “Audacious Philanthropy,” 1.

<sup>7</sup> Noelle Damico, “How Worker-Driven Social Responsibility is Ending Gender-Based Violence,” *For A Better World* (2018), 16.

depends on workers as opposed to corporations to hold employers accountable. WSR is a much more effective solution than corporate social responsibility, which is designed to benefit the corporation, is developed without worker participation, applies generic and voluntary standards, and has no avenue for enforcement. WSR on the other hand 1) addresses the imbalance of power through legally-binding agreements with consequences; 2) provides not just information but worker-to worker education and training; 3) has consequences for perpetrators and bystanders; 4) provides close monitoring of conditions with deep-dive audits.<sup>8</sup> The CIW is not a union, nor is it built around tactics that flow from top to bottom. Rather, the organization is comprised of group-centered leaders where strategies are fully developed at the base.<sup>9</sup>

Other sources have cited the CIW's success as a result of their cooperation with faith-based organizations. These communities were a natural ally because of "the deeply spiritual nature of farmworkers themselves," and this cooperation was so effective because "like other elements of the campaign, it too was multi-layered."<sup>10</sup> In addition, their choice not to merge with unions, specifically the UFW has contributed to their continued success. Instead of unions, the CIW's closest labor allies have been anarchist/syndicate-based, reflecting their ideological roots in Zapatismo, and reflecting their slogan 'Everyone is a Leader.'<sup>11</sup> This strategy truly empowers workers. The combination of the CIW being farmworker-driven and maintained; practicing diversity in their approaches, partners, and leadership; their prioritization of issues affecting women; and their proven effectiveness makes the CIW an exemplary organization that embodies the ecofeminist principle of diversity.

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<sup>8</sup> Damico, "How Worker-Driven Social Responsibility is Ending Gender-Based Violence," 17.

<sup>9</sup> Elly Leary, "Immokalee Workers Take Down Taco Bell," *Monthly Review* 57, no. 05 (October 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Leary, "Immokalee Workers Take Down Taco Bell."

Other possible forms of future praxis that reflect diversity in approaches to farmworker justice could be reforming the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) guidelines so that food benefits may be used at farmers markets or to buy seeds to start a garden.<sup>12</sup> Another initiative could be to encourage food trucks and farmers markets into food deserts and vulnerable neighborhoods. Also, programs which establish school gardens as a source of nutrition for student lunches could be beneficial in teaching students about the origins of food as well as a cost-effective way to provide nutritious student foods.

An ethic of land labor must be diverse in its approach. Land labor encompasses a wide array of problems, so any solution, or group of solutions must be diverse too. This requires a true grassroots approach to question authority, pose new solutions, and decentralize existing power. Grassroots initiatives have the power to, decentralize power and wealth and to destabilize monopolization in the food system. Grassroots initiatives like this truly represent Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz' description of Mujerista Theology: *La vida es la lucha*.<sup>13</sup>

### **5.3 Principle of Radicality**

#### ***5.3.1 Why Radical***

An ethic of land labor also must be radical. By this I mean it needs to break free from the status quo patriarchal power structures. It must be radical in that it needs to look beyond capitalism and current power systems for its solutions. As demonstrated in the analysis of fair trade, because fair trade originated within the system that perpetuates oppressions, those oppressions will continue to play out within the initiative. Truly liberative practices will break free of these status quo dynamics and cause radical—deep and far reaching change.

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<sup>12</sup> Work is already under way to allow SNAP/WIC recipients to use their benefits for alternative food sourcing.

<sup>13</sup> The struggle is life.

By radical I do not mean ideological extremism, I mean the true definition of the word: “change or action relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something; characterized by departure from tradition. Its antonym is superficial.”<sup>14</sup> The failing of fair trade is that it is a superficial solution that merely puts a bandage on the situation so the wound below is hidden. What is needed are approaches that address the fundamental nature of society rather than addressing a byproduct of it.

### ***5.3.2 How Radicality Responds to Patriarchal Power Systems***

The chief concern of ecofeminists is white male dominated systems of control and violence that not just condone but carry out abuses. This is why an ecofeminist land labor ethic must be radical, because any solution that originates from the intellectual confines of the current system will ultimately fail because it is the system itself which is causing the problems. Therefore, any viable solutions must be radical—that is, they must seek to overhaul the system itself, and in doing so solve the problems that arose because of it.

### ***5.3.3 Commentary on Radical Nature of Fair Trade and the UFW***

Neither Fair Trade or the United Farm Workers are radical enough to effect foundational change because both were intended to work within the confines of the current system: fair trade depends on capitalism and UFW is based on negotiating with corporations for rights. That is not to say there is no place or need for justice systems which address immediate concerns within the current system, but not all initiatives should be that myopic. It is a task of ecofeminism to set

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<sup>14</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “radical,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20190111225321/https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/radical> (Accessed January 8, 2018).

higher goals. Neither of these movements were particularly revolutionary: it is not revolutionary to pay what a product is worth, nor is it revolutionary to receive fair compensation for one's work. These are base requirements. This raises the question whether non-radical solutions that operate under the status quo are helpful or harmful. Žižek suggests that these initiatives which are not radical enough and are content to operate within the current system are actually more harmful. He observes:

People find themselves surrounded by hideous poverty...and with admirable though misdirected intentions, they very seriously and very sentimentally set themselves to the task of remedying the evils that they see. But their remedies do not cure the disease, they merely prolong it. Indeed, the remedies are part of the disease. They try to solve the problem of poverty, for instance, by keeping the poor alive...but this is not a solution, it is an aggravation of the difficulty. The proper aim is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible, and the altruistic virtues have really prevented the carrying out of this aim. The worst slave owners were those who were kind to their slaves, and so prevented the core of the system being realized by those who suffered from it.<sup>15</sup>

Žižek too, warns of the dangers of sentimentality. I would not go so far to say that people who buy fair trade items are worse than those who do not, but if one is simultaneously working to dismantle oppressive capitalist structures, it seems these two actions are conflicting.

#### ***5.3.4 Practical Directions for Praxis***

Radical veganism may be one of the most easily accessible forms of liberating intersectional ecofeminist praxis. Radical vegans move beyond veganism as a consumer lifestyle,

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<sup>15</sup> Žižek, "The Ethical Implications of Charitable Capitalism."

recognizing that oppression of animals, humans, and the earth will not end with cruelty-free purchases because they see that the oppression of animals is linked with other forms of patriarchal oppression and that “eating animals acts a mirror and representation of patriarchal values.”<sup>16</sup> Radical veganism benefits the earth as well, as the environmental costs of raising meat have been well documented: destructive ranching, deforestation, and water pollution from factory farms are all consequences to raising animals for food.<sup>17</sup> While changing one’s eating habits alone does not qualify as a radical response, recognizing the structural issues present in our food system and making lifestyle changes that work for structural change does. Addressing the radical nature of a vegan diet, Carol Adams explains, “autonomist antipatriarchal *being* is clearly vegan. To destabilize patriarchal consumption, we must interrupt patriarchal meals of meat.”<sup>18</sup>

Another possible radical direction is the decommodification of food through food sharing and a return to subsistence farming. This could take the form of people growing more of their own food, or through not-yet developed food sharing programs that connect people looking for food with hobbyist gardeners or other small farmers who have a bumper crop.

## **5.4 Principle of Solidarity**

### ***5.4.1 Why Solidarity***

Liberation theology calls for solidarity in response to the suffering of the oppressed. What I mean by solidarity is not sympathy, not empathy, not good intentions, but solidarity as it was meant by liberation theologians: suffering alongside. Solidarity requires sacrifice. Often,

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<sup>16</sup> Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 178.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Singer, *The Ethics of What We Eat: Why Our Food Choice Matters* (Emmaus: Rodale Inc., 2007), 240.

<sup>18</sup> Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 179.



solidarity is seen as sympathizing with the Other, as a more emotionally engaged kind of advocacy. However, advocacy and this type shallow understanding of solidarity are superficial and misdirected. Joerg Rieger echoes this sentiment that advocacy and one-sided solidarity can pose problems because “advocates often assume that they are speaking for those who have no voice” and because they can walk away at any time.<sup>19</sup> He instead suggests deep solidarity, a practice of recognizing and utilizing differences among people for the good of the oppressed based on the understanding that we are all ultimately in the same boat.<sup>20</sup> However, he is missing a key piece: sacrifice and suffering. Solidarity without these is just another form of sentimentality.

A key component of liberation theology is the suffering of the oppressed, the daily struggle: *la lucha*. Leonardo Boff calls for, at minimum, “suffering with” the suffering that affects the majority of the human race for liberation theology to be understood.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, if solidarity is aimed at changing power relations, then it will require those in power to lose some of their privilege either willingly or by force. Solidarity is not a state of mind: it is action. There can be no solidarity without sacrifice.

#### ***5.4.2 How Solidarity Responds to Systemic Racism***

This conception of solidarity responds to systemic racism because it forces one to confront the ways in which they participate in the system. When one is called into solidarity, one must examine the ways in which their life is benefited by privilege and evaluate the ways or things that must change in order to practice solidarity. This is especially the case with racial and

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<sup>19</sup> Joerg Rieger and Rosemarie Henkel-Rieger, “Deep Solidarity: Broadening the Basis of Transformation,” *HTS Teologiese Studies* 73, no. 3 (September 1, 2017), 2.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987), 3.

gender-based privilege. There must be sacrifice by those living a life of privilege because the privilege comes at a cost of oppressing others. This solidarity requires a willingness to give up this privilege. There is a tendency to conceptualize oppressed as an independent state of being, but to make it more palatable and to minimize one's own complicity, we tend to refer to the oppressed without acknowledging the other part of the phrase: oppressed *by*.<sup>22</sup>

Dismantling the systems that put power in the hands of white people is up to white people who benefit from that power. It requires them to first understand where that power comes from, second, accept responsibility for it, and three, work to identify and dismantle it. It is not the task of white people to 'help' people of color who have been disenfranchised by systemic racism, it is their task to confront white supremacy directly. "Dismantling white supremacy is the charge of white people who are the sole beneficiaries of this oppressive system, whether they want to be or not."<sup>23</sup> Not doing anything is privilege.

#### ***5.4.3 Commentary on Solidarity in Fair Trade & the UFW***

Reflecting on fair trade, it may have started with good intentions of doing actions that could accompany solidarity, but because of the hegemonic system in which it originated, it has not been able to actualize its goals in the best case scenario, and in the worst, there were many companies who spotted a weaknesses and exploited it for a profit. In addition, fair trade was trying to solve problems while maintaining a position of power. For fair trade consumers, there was no sacrifice, other than a few cents at the register, no suffering, no additional work to address the systemic problems that created the situation. There was only gain.

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<sup>22</sup> Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Layla F. Saad, "I need to talk to spiritual white women about white supremacy," entry posted August 15, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190115121938/http://laylafsaad.com/poetry-prose/white-women-white-supremacy-1> (Accessed September 30, 2018).

As far as the UFW is concerned, solidarity with the farm worker was adequate. The grape boycott may seem similar to fair trade, but there's the essential difference that fair trade encourages a specific type of high-end consumerism whereas the grape boycott encouraged withdrawing from consumerism until certain demands were met. The solidarity occurring in the union movement was adequate in the fact that it was called for by farmworkers, specifying specific outlines for action (the boycott) instead of operating in reverse where the people with power require certain behavior to merit their engagement with the cause (fair trade). The breadth of the boycott was overwhelming, but it lacked commitment within non-farmworker communities to follow through with additional actions to directly address the causes of labor exploitation. Advocates paid a small sacrifice: no table grapes, and many took part in physical acts of solidarity including pilgrimaging and picketing, but by and large the UFW boycott was what Boff calls restricted commitment: a commitment characterized by sporadic visits to communities, meetings, and intermittent involvement.<sup>24</sup> For the workers, when the strike ended the work began: they could begin to bargain with growers for better conditions. For the other communities, when the strike ended it was over and they could resume their lives as they were before. This ability to step in and out of activism is a privilege.

#### ***5.4.4 Practical Directions for Praxis***

Solidarity is not a grand gesture, and “revolution is not a one-time event;” nor does change happen around us rather than inside of us.<sup>25</sup> It is a process. Practicing praxis through solidarity does not consist of grand movements that center the person acting; practicing solidarity starts at home, in our minds. It starts with education, with identifying one's privilege, and one's

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<sup>24</sup> Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press Feminist Series, 2007), 140.

conscious—or subconscious—racist thoughts, words, and actions. It is a commitment to action, not just a realization. Layla Saad provides an excellent resource for those interested in doing the work of dismantling white supremacy and provides guidelines for suggested courses of action. This action consists of white people calling one another out and holding one another accountable, of white people taking themselves out of the center of every issue, of holding leaders and family accountable, and it consists of speaking to one's children about racism.<sup>26</sup> It involves calling out racist behavior in church groups and in the workplace, and learning to address difference with respect.<sup>27</sup> This involves risk, for some people fear, and in some cases requires sacrifice. It involves the risk losing friendships and may cost the respect of some people. Speaking to white people in particular: we must take a close look at whether we place our comfort over solidarity and the work of anti-racism.<sup>28</sup>

While this section specifically addresses systemic racism, this praxis holds true for people with other types of privilege and requires action from them as well, particularly in the form of men holding one another accountable.

## **5.5 Principle of Enrichment**

### ***5.5.1 Why Enrichment***

Food should enrich bodies, but it should also enrich those who grow it and the planet that sustains that growth. A food system which depletes the lifeblood of farmers and the earth is not sustainable. Growing food in a way that treats both workers and planet as disposable is not only unacceptable but will end in failure. Growing food in a way that enriches the earth and the lives

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<sup>26</sup> Layla F. Saad, “me and white supremacy workbook,” (Self-published, 2018), 90.

<sup>27</sup> Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 141.

<sup>28</sup> Saad, “me and white supremacy workbook,” 106.

of those who cultivate it *is* possible, and it is a vital requirement of any ecofeminist solution. Work in the fields should strengthen the body not break it; eating fruits of one's labor should nourish the body not poison it, and cultivating the earth to create food should enrich the planet not degrade it.

Until this point, much of the discussion has been on differences, yet with regard to our existence as humans who inhabit earth, we are tied together. We all live on this planet and our fates are tied to it. Whereas we each might have different callings in terms of justice work to be done, we are all called to act on behalf of the earth.

### ***5.5.2 How Enrichment Responds to Neglect of the Earth***

Currently, our global food system is responsible for a third of all greenhouse gas emissions, and the resulting changes in climate are having disastrous effects on our ability to produce food due to floods and droughts.<sup>29</sup> Naturally, farmworkers are on the front lines of these changing weather patterns, causing further struggle. They are out of work when a region-wide crop of citrus in California dies due to freezing temperatures, and were out of work as the drought in California worsened:

*How does one improve their family's situation? If there's no water, there's no work. This is a huge problem for a mother. I'm from Mexico. I came from Tijuana. I came here because I thought there would be a little better opportunity to raise my kids. The effects*

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<sup>29</sup> Damian Carrington, "Global Food System is Broken, Say World's Science Academies," *The Guardian* (November 28, 2018) <https://web.archive.org/web/20190106214730/https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/nov/28/global-food-system-is-broken-say-worlds-science-academies> (Accessed December 18, 2018).

*of the drought that I have seen right now is that work is ending. You can not continue producing fruit.*<sup>30</sup>

Alternatively, farmworkers lose out on work in Florida and the eastern seaboard due to flooding, especially during hurricane season. They also lose out on housing. The *campos*, or typical accommodations farmworkers live in during the harvest are not sufficient shelter during a hurricane, and often stranded immigrants have nowhere to go. This is especially the case because many are often reluctant to seek government assistance. Work on behalf of the planet is one thing we are all called to do because the earth truly does not have a (human) voice. The food system must be enriching; it must enrich the soil, bodies, livelihoods, relationships with the earth, with one another, and with the Creator.

### ***5.5.3 Commentary on Enrichment within Fair Trade and the UFW***

The environmental impact of both fair trade and the UFW has been discussed above, and both have fallen short of being truly earth-enriching. Fair trade, in theory, put an emphasis on enriching relationships by minimizing the middle man, enriching the land through education about sustainable farming techniques, and enriching workers through better wages. Yet its total contribution to environment is questionable given that its basis requires so much transportation. In line with its original intent, fair trade encouraged relationships between people who otherwise would not have much interaction. This aspect of building relationships based on mutual goals is an aspect of enrichment that may be beneficial for future work. However, the dynamic that these

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<sup>30</sup> Dyan Ruiz and Joseph Smooke, "Farm Workers Surviving the Drought in California," *People, Power Media* (June 15, 2014) <https://web.archive.org/web/20190106214411/https://www.peoplepowermedia.org/workers-rights/farm-workers-surviving-drought-california> (Accessed December 19, 2018).

relationships were initiated and determined by the person in power is an aspect to avoid if truly enriching relationships are to be developed.

The UFW has also fallen short especially with regard to enriching the earth—it is not a priority at all. The UFW also fell short in terms of fostering enriching relationships among its members.

#### ***5.5.4 Practical Directions for Praxis***

Examples of enriching praxis can take many forms. It could refer to intentionally cultivating relationships that prioritize growth, adopting habits and lifestyles that enrich the planet, developing crops that are higher in nutrition through intentional farming, or enriching one's practice of faith. Two farmers that prioritize enrichment are Joel Salatin and Dan Barber. Joel Salatin owns Polyface Farm, a farm that claims “stimulating soil biota is our first priority. Soil health creates healthy food.” The many techniques Salatin embraces to ensure a net gain for both the earth and in terms of food (including a policy of not shipping any of their products) are described in depth in Michael Pollan's interviews. In an impressive example, he boasts that his farm raises 35,000 dozen eggs but the pasture will be in no way diminished by the process—in fact it will be lusher, more fertile, and even springier underfoot thanks to the increased earthworm traffic.<sup>31</sup>

An additional example of how to enrich our food system is in the work of Dan Barber, who along with Michael Mazourek and Matthew Goldfarb worked together to establish a seed company focused around crossbreeding and cultivating seeds primarily for flavor and texture, as

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 127.

well as cultivating them to be disease-resistant to make them easier to grow organically.<sup>32</sup> He grows firm but flavorful squash, potatoes with the texture of creaminess, and sweet as opposed to earthy beets. All seeds are organic and non-patented.

Barber has also done work collaborating with seed collectors to return Eight Row Flint to its place of origin in New England and the Hudson Valley. Eight Row Flint is a rare corn with eight rows of kernels that had been selected by generations of Native Americans throughout the 16-1800s for its distinct sweet flavor.<sup>33</sup> A brutal cold in 1816 wiped out the crop, as seeds went to feed people and livestock. The same strain has been found in southern Italy, where it's been existing for the past two hundred years under a different name. By planting a few seeds, he helped grow "an important and threatened historic flavor of Italy while simultaneously repatriating one of New England's extinct foodways."<sup>34</sup> This type of work enriches the diversity of crops as well as the flavors on our plate. We must realize our reliance on food and elevate its production and those who produce it.

## **5.6 Faith-Based Motivation**

It is not unsurprising that many of the initiatives discussed in this paper have risen from centers of faith, as people of faith typically seek out ways to put their faith into action. Any of the actions I have suggested as practical outlets of praxis could be misconstrued to become an oppressive mechanism. It is the failings of people rooted in selfishness and greed that could cause this, and in this light, no initiative can ever be perfect because of the imperfection of

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<sup>32</sup> Row 7 Seeds, "Our Seeds,"

<https://web.archive.org/web/20190115140920/https://www.row7seeds.com/collections/seeds> (Accessed January 8, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> Dan Barber, *The Third Plate: Field Notes on the Future of Food* (London: Penguin Books, 2015), 1.

<sup>34</sup> Barber, *The Third Plate*, 1.



human nature. This is where faith can play its most important role: to guide its followers in the right courses of action. In the work of Christ, Christianity provides its followers with a blueprint for how we ought to conduct ourselves if we take the biblical message of love and self-sacrifice seriously. This higher standard to which we must aspire is ever focused on the love of our neighbor and our call to live out that love in the world. Fletcher discusses how this love does not include any type of white or Christian supremacy, explaining that it is instead rooted in being in right relationship with fellow humans.<sup>35</sup> The idea of love rooted in the gospels can help in “retrieving ancient wisdoms to critique the epic failure to love that is white supremacy, and hoping for patterns for a way forward to love in a weighted world.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy*, 113.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

## CHAPTER 6:

### Final Thoughts

#### **6.1 Major Arguments**

Upon reflection on the above ideas, three conclusions arise.

1. Farmworker initiatives have ultimately failed because the true causes of their exploitation are not being addressed. Farmworkers' struggle is a direct result of white patriarchal capitalist systems of oppression. The solution is not people of privilege prescribing how the those they're oppressing should best deal with their lack of power. The solution is for people of privilege to intentionally check that privilege and take steps to use their power to dismantle the system which gave it to them.
2. Ecofeminists advocating for farmworker rights must address first and foremost the problems that they are perpetuating. Well-intentioned activism does not ensure right action. Fair trade functions to reinforce dangerous power systems, and is essentially a form of neocolonialism. The UFW was a better model which had a significant impact initially, but due to internal power dynamics and its myopic vision it failed to sustain that change.
3. To stop the exploitation and oppression of farmworkers will require wide ranging foundational change with each individual playing a different role. I call white Christians and people with privilege to use their faith as a resource to start the work of dismantling the oppressive powers of patriarchy, white and Christian supremacy, and the violence of capitalism. This praxis should be first and foremost through self-reflection and work within one's own communities. It is up to white men and women who have power to fix

the problem, not help farmworkers live better within the system. Ultimately, farmworker justice movements begin with eliminating source of the oppression, and this work begins at home.

## **6.2 Critiques & Shortcomings of My Research**

In discussing these issues, it is vital to self-reflect and acknowledge any complicity I may have while writing this. I am acutely aware of the criticism that could be leveled in terms of my complicity in these dominant forms of exploitation. I have been shaped by my experiences, which do not include the depth of suffering that many people have experienced in their own lives or in the pain passed down through generations. My perspective is limited in that I cannot speak to the ways in which generations of pain and oppression form an identity. However, I can speak with authority on the problems I see within my own community, and encourage others to address problems within their own communities as well. By focusing on different types of oppression: financial, class, environmental, etc. I hope to avoid the critique commonly leveled at ecofeminists of essentialism, or referring to an all-inclusive category of women, or an all-inclusive category of people who experience oppression.

## **6.3 Further Research**

This paper provides many opportunities for future research. Since this paper dealt mostly with Christianity, one area for future work would be to examine the role other faith traditions play in perpetuating oppressive systems and also the ways in which they could act as a resource for people of faith seeking to break down oppressive systems of thought.

Another area is applying these principles to other areas of land labor. While I have focused mainly on farmworkers, the principles discussed are relevant for other forms of land-based labor. A deeper investigation to why we remain hesitant to embrace the art of growing food, landscaping, or our need for public landscapers would be valuable.

A final area for further research would be to investigate the ethics of asking people to give up something which was given to them unfairly for the benefit of someone else. White people have a privilege which although they certainly possess it, they did nothing to deserve it. What is the reason people would or should relinquish this unfair advantage: out of love, out of duty that it is the right thing to do, out of obligation? What about uses of force to take back the undeserved power? Included in this, it would be beneficial to examine the deeper meaning of privilege and the line between privilege as received and privilege as exercised. That is, looking at the difference between something one passively inherits, and the act of using that privilege. For example, one may be born with the privilege of having white skin, yet one may exercise privilege through shopping at a nearby healthy grocery store. Which are the most dangerous? Which privileges do we exercise that we ought not to?

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

If this framework seems more like a patchwork quilt than a guided map with directions it is, and it is intentionally so. There is no single path for all people to follow, and no easily implemented step-by-step course of action. The solution does not lie in one organization, one person, or one faith. Rather, it lies in what Ruether explains as “transformative metanoia and

slow maturation of a grounded self in community, able to be both self-affirming and other-affirming in life-enhancing mutuality.”<sup>1</sup>

The structure of this paper has followed liberation theology’s three-part process involving faith-based action or praxis, theological reflection on that action, and most importantly a renewed praxis. According to this idea, this work is the work of bringing about the Kingdom of God: “the theology of liberation means establishing the relationship that exists between human emancipation—in the social political and economic orders—and the Kingdom of God”<sup>2</sup> This paper functions as the second act—a theological reflection on the first act as well as a commitment to action. In this way, the first act was the initiatives of fair trade and the UFW, our theology is our reflection on them and most importantly, a renewed praxis and a commitment to action. My hope is that these principles and this framework will encourage not a blind following of what is seen as social justice, but a continuing conversation and a constant renewing of our actions and our commitment to faith.

It’s true, the principles of an ecofeminist ethic of land labor really have more to do with each person working within their own sphere towards a common goal: to dismantle patriarchy and white supremacy, than they do of acting on behalf of land laborers. It is not up to the oppressed to break systems of oppression, it’s up to the oppressors. We must work together, but that doesn’t mean doing the same thing. It means working towards the same goal. We must each use our unearned advantage to weaken systems of unearned advantage. Ultimately, all farmworker justice movements must begin with eliminating the source of the oppression which

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<sup>1</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Dualism and the Nature of Evil in Feminist Theology,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 5, no. 1 (1992), 39.

<sup>2</sup> Gutierrez, “Toward a Theology of Liberation,” in *Essential Writings*, 26.

for many people lies within their own minds, practices, and communities. In this way, justice starts at home.

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## APPENDIX A:

### Acronyms

Cal/OSHA	State of California Division of Occupational Safety and Health
CIW	Coalition of Immakolee Workers
CLAC	Caribbean Network of Small Fair Trade Producers
CSO	Community Service Organization
CMM	California Migrant Ministry
FLC	Farm Labor Contractor
FLO	Fairtrade Labeling Organization
FLSA	Fair Labor Standards Act
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMO	Genetically Modified Organism
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
NFWA	National Farm Workers Association
QCEW	Quarterly Census of Employees and Wages
SERRV	Sales Exchange for Refugee Rehabilitation
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
UCIRI	Union of Indigenous Communities in the Isthmus Region
UFW	United Farm Workers
WFTO	World Fair Trade Organization
WIC	SNAP for Women, Infants, and Children
WSR	Worker-driven Social Responsibility